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THE

MONEY-LENDER.

BY

MRS. GORE,

AUTHORESS OF "MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS,"

"THE MAN OF FORTUNE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,

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PREFACE.

THE following story should be entitled a Romance, rather than a Novel. A Romance does not necessarily infer preternatural agency, as the "Romance of the Forest" and the "Bravo of Venice" (two of the most popular in our language) suffice to prove. A Romance is more properly a fiction, describing improbable, but not impossible, events, founded on fact, and appealing to the imagination, rather than to the reason, of the reader.

Amid the prevailing taste for investing fiction with a tone of reality, and creating

an interest in the homeliest events of every-day occurrence, there may be some hazard in an attempt to render "romantic" the incidents in the life of a "Money-lender." The universal praise bestowed by the critics of the day on those passages of the history of "Abednego" which have already appeared in a popular Magazine, entitles me to believe that the undertaking has not been altogether unsuccessful.

C. F. G.

THE MONEY-LENDER.

CHAPTER I.

Antonio and old Shylock, both stand forth!

SHAKSPEARE.

EVERY social epoch has its distinctive vices, even as epidemics prevail at different seasons and in sundry localities. As surely as the canals of Batavia, the jungles of Sierra-Leone, or the Campagna of Rome, generate malaria and disease, is the infancy of a nation, "ere human statutes purge the general weal," distorted by the convulsions of bloodshed and rapine; while, in the national corruption succeeding the over-

ripeness of civilization, are engendered the colder-blooded crimes of treachery and fraud. According to a genealogical tree, not recorded in the Herald's Office, the prodigal and the wanton are parents of the swindler, —the forger,—the usurer.—Though the knife of the guillotine and bolt of the gallows be of iron, the mainspring influencing their action is formed of a more precious metal. The root of the evil is—GOLD!

The first fifteen years of the present century constituted a stirring epoch. The swell of the waters of strife had not yet subsided after the recent revolutionary storm, and the gallant vessels of the various states of Europe were still in peril of a shock. On all sides, resounded the "ha, ha!" of the trumpet, and the neighing of the war-horse. A sword was in every hand, and angry passions contended in every breast.

At such periods, the minds of men wax fierce and reckless. The coveter of other

men's goods hardens into the highway robber; the coveter of other men's lives, attacks by open violence rather than by poison or stealth: "I dare not," no longer "waits upon I would." The social body is in a state of terrible excitement.—Its very virtues are ferocious;—what can be expected of its vices?

Yet the unnatural calm that *succeeds* to this enthusiasm of atrocity, an inglorious sloth of national soul and body arising from prolonged peace and prosperity, has results almost equally pernicious. As the glaring summer heats bring forth the noisome insect or fatal reptile race, a brood of despicable vices and grovelling crimes is hatched into existence by the sunshine of aimless prosperity. As in the becalming of the ocean, so powerfully described by Coleridge,

> Slimy things do crawl with legs,
> Upon the slimy sea.

Even "creeping things" acquire force,

when "innumerable;" and by the time the swords of legions of disbanded mercenaries have been converted into the implements of the housebreaker and pickpocket, and the gold-shed of luxury has exercised as hardening an influence over the human heart as the bloodshed of a more turbulent period, we begin almost to regret the times when perpetual terror of body begat a more urgent terror of peril to the immortal soul.

While the ascendancy of Napoleon diffused throughout Europe a panic rivalling the Reign of Terror created by Robespierre in France, the generous affections remained in play, to controvert the frenzy of national virulence and party hatred. Most people had some near and dear connexion involved in the dangers of the war; and even the frivolous classes blushed to surrender themselves to the mere vanities of life, when the next courier might bring tidings of the sacrifice of thousands of human beings, or of the one individual dearer than all beside.

The service of plate,—the gaudy equipage,—the diamond coronet,—forfeited a portion of their value. A death's-head was at every banquet,—a *memento mori* at every ball,—a premonitory knell in every ear!

But the moment these anxieties abated, and

Grim-visaged war did smoothe his wrinkled front,

what tenfold requital did the worldlings yield themselves for previous self-denial!—What an uproar of rejoicing, what prodigality of pleasure, what cost, what splendour, what riot, what intemperance, celebrated the ratification of peace! England thought no further of her legions of dead or millions wasted; and not content with hanging up her conquered banners in triumph, or chanting her *Te Deums* with grateful solemnity, suffered her anthems to be overpowered by a Bacchanalian roar, and the senseless giggle of fashionable levity.

Intoxicated by the brilliancy of a con-

gress of kings in their capital, the English hurried to the Continent to keep up the fever of excitement, and from that moment the manners of the day acquired a looser tone, a more epicurean luxury. London grew ashamed of its homeliness, and began to affect airs of *virtù* and graces of *savoir vivre*. New customs were introduced, and splendid enervation prevailed. To that epoch may be retraced the ruin of many a princely fortune. Not only were millions left behind by our migrant aristocracy in foreign capitals, or the gaming-tables of Paris, Spa, or Baden; but, on their return to England, their residences, whether in London or the provinces, afforded disgraceful evidence of the new dis-order of things. Foreign servants abounded in every noble household; foreign tradesmen were established in every street. Everything worn, eaten, said, or done, was *à la* this, or *à la* that; and money rose proportionately in value, and timber fell. Unlike the

ancient retainers or hereditary purveyors of graver times, these strangers came like locusts into the land, to plunder, devour, and take flight again; and thenceforward, multiplied advertisements of family estates to be sold, family mansions to be let, and "MONEY TO BE ADVANCED TO NOBLEMEN OR GENTLEMEN" on the most disinterested terms, attested the progress we were making in national refinement.

Among the latter, and singularly familiar to the young spendthrifts of the Universities and the Guards, were the manifestoes of a certain A. O., to whom reference was to be made by letter, addressed to the Hungerford Coffee-house. There was a tone of respectability in the phrasing of these advertisements. They had the air of proceeding from some gentleman with a large floating capital, and no great faith in government securities, anxious to obtain good interest and a safe investment for his money,—perhaps for the benefit of a deserv-

ing wife and numerous family. People, reduced for the first time to the shame of borrowing, said to themselves, "A. O. is my man!"—There was far less humiliation in addressing a letter to the Hungerford Coffee-house, than in being seen entering the doors of notorious money-brokers in Cork Street or Pall Mall.

But it was observed that no man *after* a similar application, was ever known to refer his friend to the same source of relief. No one talked about A. O.,—no one admitted that he had any cognizance of this mysterious personage. Or if, in an orgie of thoughtless boys about to repair to the gambling-table, or confessing the ill-luck of the previous night and its results, some novice suggested the well advertised name of A. O., every one present appeared anxious to change the conversation. Each had instantly some pet usurer to recommend.

Still, not a soul was positively heard to say, "*Beware* of A. O.!" A charm seemed

attached to the name,—so averse were even the most hardened thirsters after the pocket's blood, to pronounce its direful initials. However prompt to revile the originators of all other advertisements of a similar description, as legitimate descendants of Barabbas, no one whispered a syllable against A. O. Discriminating persons may perhaps infer—that most of these cautious friends were in his power!

At a dinner at the Guards' Club in St. James's Street, early in the Autumn of 1822, it was observed that, discussions having arisen concerning recent losses at play, at Graham's renowned Temple of Chance, where, at that moment, fortunes were winning and losing with fearful rapidity, the countenance of a young officer, who had hitherto listened to such allusions with perfect unconcern, became singularly agitated. It was noticed with the more surprise, because Basil Annesley never entered the doors of Graham's, and bore no

relationship to any one of the parties whose affairs were thus freely canvassed.

"Four thousand on Thursday night, and three thousand last week!" observed Colonel Loftus.—"Poor Sir Grinsel! I'm afraid 'tis all up with him! He told me himself he had raised twelve thousand last month; and that he had not a resource left,—mortgaged to the last guinea,—every stick on his Irish estates gone!—Poor Sir Grinsel!"

"He has latterly had recourse to A. O.," added Captain Blencowe, in a grave under tone;—"so one can understand the sort of straits to which he must be reduced."

"A. O.!—Why, surely, that is the person to whom my uncle, the Duke of Rochester, is said to owe thirty thousand pounds?"—cried a youngster who had lately joined, and was fond of citing his "uncle the duke," (a weakness of course hoaxed out of him before he had been six months in the regiment.)

"Ay, and out of whose clutches half the

fellows you meet every day in St. James's Street would be right glad to extricate themselves," retorted Captain Blencowe. "A. O. is the last resource of ruined men;—the executioner who gives the *coup de grâce*."

"What the deuce do you mean by the *coup de grâce?*"—demanded the lad so proud of being nephew to a duke.

"The *coup de grâce*, is the stroke given to a victim on the wheel, to put him out of his pain," replied a grey matter-of-fact old colonel, who officiated as dry-nurse to the subalterns.

"I meant that A. O. was the blackguard who aims the first blow at ruined men; the sort of fellow to fling a stone at a drowning dog, scarcely able to keep his head above water."

"It was he, I fancy, who arrested Eggerstone," observed Colonel Loftus.

"And it was a writ obtained by A. O. that drove Frederick Lumley to Brussels!"

rejoined Captain Blencowe. "A man must, in short, have exhausted all other resources, to have recourse to him. However, it must be added that he is unfailing at a pinch. The brute is always flush of cash; and, if one chooses to rush into the jaws of a shark with one's eyes open, one is more to blame than the creature that follows its instincts by closing them upon one.—I once borrowed money of A. O.—I had tried every other quarter.—A minor with only personal security to offer, the case seemed hopeless. — However, the cormorant was tempted by thirty per cent., and the attestation of my honest countenance and promissory note; and to my dying day, never shall I forget the joy with which I found myself redeemed from the thraldom of the debt, within the year, by the generosity of an old aunt, who was good enough to die for the purpose."

"Within a year! what had you to fear from him?"

"Nothing to *fear*,—much to *endure!* I had made the interest of that accursed five hundred pounds, payable monthly, out of the allowance which my skin-flint of a Scotch guardian doled out to me in the same manner; and every third of the month was I visited by a hateful night-mare, in the shape of A. O.—I think I see the door of my room opening to admit him!"

"But why not make it payable at your banker's or agent's?"

"He conditioned that it should be paid from hand to hand. I suspect he chose to have an eye upon the morals and health of his debtor; for one day, when he made his appearance as usual, and the effects of a gin punch party at Limmer's the previous night were only too visible in my face, I remember his fixing his keen eyes *into* me, like the talons of a bird of prey, and inquiring the nature of the disorder that made me so ghastly—just as a ghoul might be supposed

to investigate the state of the corpse upon which it was about to make its loathsome repast!"

"Fine him! fine him!—Upon my soul, Blencowe, you are too bad!" cried several voices.

"You positively make me sick, with your ghoul and your A. O.!" added the Duke of Rochester's nephew.

"He did *me!*" retorted the captain, earnestly; "the very recollection sickens me now. Loftus! the claret!—Something too much of this!"—and the wine was passed round, and the table soon resumed its tone of wonted hilarity.

All this time, Basil Annesley had been peeling his walnuts as assiduously as though they were destined for some fair neighbour at a dinner party, instead of for his listless self. In point of fact, he knew not that he had so much as a walnut on his plate. Throughout the discussion he had been all

ear; and chose an occupation enabling him to listen with his face depressed, so as to conceal his deep interest in the matter.

But the very means he took to disguise his emotion caused it to be noticed. Basil Annesley was one of those open-spirited fellows who confront the observation of society with an ever frank and fearless countenance; and to find his forehead, usually held so high, thus pertinaciously incumbent, and his voice, usually so free in discussion, thus perseveringly silent, excited surmises in the mind of Loftus, who sat opposite to him, as well as in that of the grey-headed colonel.

"What is the meaning of all this?—Has poor Annesley been playing?"—was the secret conjecture of both. "Another victim to *écarte* or hazard!—Another victim for the remorseless claws of A. O.!"

Yet Annesley had never been noticed to enter a gambling-house. The play of fashionable London was not then concentrated

into so decided a focus as it has since become. But in a community so small as that to which Basil was attached, a man addicted to any grosser vice is soon convicted; and he had hitherto passed for a lady's man —an Almack's pet—rather than for a fellow likely to be carried away by the dissipations of *roué* life.

It was only a year since Basil Annesley had joined the Guards. On quitting Harrow, he had completed his education at a foreign university; and soon afterwards, as the son of the late Sir Bernard Annesley, one of the bravest victims of the Peninsular war, had obtained a commission from the generous patronage of the royal Commander-in-Chief. Of the state of his fortunes little was authentically known. From the period of the General's death his mother had resided in retirement. No one knew whether she were rich or poor. Basil never mentioned her name. It was concluded that he spent the periods of his leave of absence

from his regiment with Lady Annesley, but on his return he made no allusion to the visit. His habits of life induced the inference that his allowance was less than liberal; but though lively and open on indifferent subjects, Basil was too reserved concerning his family affairs, and too self-possessed in his good-breeding, for his brother officers to hazard offending him by betraying impertinent curiosity.

Still, the grey-headed colonel, known in the regiment by the name of Old Carrington and the character of an officious bore, meditated, on the present occasion, some investigation of the origin of the young ensign's embarrassment; when, just as he was turning towards him for a re-introduction of the subject of A. O., Basil Annesley, throwing his napkin on the back of his chair, rose and hurried out of the room.

Now Old Carrington was gouty, and the active movements of a lad of twenty soon distanced those of a man who to twenty

added five and twenty years more,—many of them years of active service; so that, before the Waterloo colonel was able to crook his finger round the button of his ensign, Basil had cast his eyes over the advertisements of the *Morning Post*, and ascertained, to a letter, the address of the money-lender to whom Wilberton's uncle, the Duke of Rochester, was said to owe thirty thousand pounds.

In another half hour he had not only reached his lodgings, but finished and sealed his letter to A. O. Instead of placing it upon the chimney-piece, however, to attract the notice of his servant, (as was his custom with those destined for the twopenny post,) Basil Annesley not only left it upon the table, but placed the blotting-book in which he had been writing, over it, like a tombstone, as if—"look on't again he dare not!"

A letter entreating a personal interview with a money-lender!—an abject letter from *him*, the proud-spirited son of a proud-

hearted mother! What would that mother think of him, could she suppose that, disregarding her solemn charges, her affectionate adjurations, he had, within so short a time of entering the army, involved himself in debt to a degree requiring the intervention of an usurer!

Poor Basil threw himself at full length on the sofa of his chamber, with his hands clasped over his head, and his eyes fixed vacantly upon a staring print of the Hetman's Daughter; which in a gaudy frame graced the opposite wall, as likenesses of Cerito or Duvernay embellish the bachelor lodgings of the present day; revolving within himself, with desperate self-recrimination, all that had passed between him and Lady Annesley on the chapter of finance, at their last interview.

It was impossible to conceive a greater contrast, than between the noisy and public life he was leading in town, and the monotonous seclusion of Barlingham Grange.

Situated within a mile of the New Forest, the ancient mansion inhabited by the widow of Sir Bernard Annesley resembled rather a moated farm-house than the cottages of gentility to which widows of moderate means are apt to retire to meet the exigencies of a small establishment. Concealed within the intricacies of a wooded country, attainable only by a detestable cross-road or rather cross-lane cutting across the Forest from Lyndhurst, Barlingham Grange, or as it was abbreviated by the cottagers in the neighbourhood, The Grange, was excluded from all communication with the active world; and Lady Annesley was so cold in her deportment, and so wedded to the solitude in which she had resolutely ensconced herself, that, but for the affectionate fervour of Basil's nature, it must have appeared a penance to him rather than a schoolboy's holiday, to journey twice a year from Harrow into Hampshire, and return thither for a couple of months, between

the period of his quitting Heidelberg, and entering the army.

Accustomed, however, to ascribe the melancholy reserve of his surviving parent to affliction for the loss of his father, Basil respected her austere melancholy; and though in his boyhood there had been moments when, weary of flinging stones into the old moat to startle the dab-chicks from the reeds, and of contemplating the dilapidated pointed gables of the old red-brick mansion, he had almost wished he might never again set eyes on Barlingham,—when he returned thither to be folded with momentary warmth to the heart of his grave mother, and submit anew to the cross-questioning of her venerable maid Dorcas, and the maundering of the old gardener, the only male domestic of that primitive establishment, he could not forbear feeling that, after all, home was home,—a mother, a mother; although the former exhibited the uttermost stagnation of earthly dulness, and

the latter a reserve according better with the measured affections of more distant relationship.

But Lady Annesley was no longer young. Though still exhibiting traces of beauty of the highest order, she had long passed her fiftieth year; and those eager demonstrations of maternal affection, which burst from the hearts of younger mothers, were not to be expected of a widowed matron, in whom a life of utter solitude confirmed the tendencies which had led to its adoption. Nor was Basil an only son. She had a daughter, twelve years older than himself; a daughter who, having married young and settled in the North, was now the mother of a numerous family of her own; and as from the period of her marriage Lady Annesley and Mrs. Vernon had been never known to meet, it might be inferred that the maternal sensibilities of Sir Bernard's widow were of no very vivid nature. She had evidently never recovered the shock of his untimely death.

Still, in spite of appearances, Basil thought otherwise. Undemonstrative as she was, there were moments when he had detected his mother's eyes suffused with tears when fixed, as if furtively, upon his face. On one occasion, when she had taken leave of him with her usual serenity on his departure for Harrow, having been compelled to return a quarter of an hour afterwards in search of a letter addressed to Dr. Butler which he had left behind, he found her, on re-entering her cheerless sitting-room, with her face buried in the cushions of her sofa, sobbing as though her heart would break; yet, when aware of his presence, as if irritated that he should have been a witness of her grief, she only chided his carelessness, and did not renew her parting caress.

He could scarcely remember his sister. She had been brought up by her father's family. Basil was only seven years old at the period of her marriage; and whenever,

in earlier life, he expressed to his mother a wish to see Helena again, Lady Annesley replied, "that they were not likely to meet, Mr. Vernon being an odd man;" an equivocal phrase, implying little or much, according to the acceptation of the hearer. Basil had taken it for granted that his brother-in-law was a brute, who, on account of his sister's want of fortune, tyrannized over her, and kept her apart from her family. But as Mrs. Vernon, during their two or three interviews, had not deigned to bestow on him a single sisterly caress, he felt little indignation in her behalf; and had, in fact, almost ceased to recal to mind the existence of this estranged relative.

"It is really disgraceful that Helena should exhibit such unnatural indifference!" he once observed to his mother.

"The result of bringing up a child under another's roof! Barlingham was never her home, and she has forgotten that it is that of her mother and brother."

A hectic flush tinged Lady Annesley's pale cheek at the observation, and Basil instantly repented his words; for he had now begun to surmise that the strict seclusion in which they lived, and the adoption of his elder sister by his uncle, had a common origin in the straitened means of his mother. It was strange indeed, that Admiral Annesley should not have selected, as the object of his favour, the son rather than the daughter of his deceased brother. But this might be easily accounted for. At the period of Sir Bernard's death, Basil was of an age to require the affectionate services of a mother; while Helena was nearly sixteen, and her education completed. Moreover he flattered himself that Lady Annesley's partiality for her boy was not without its influence in the selection.

A portion of Basil's uncertainties concerning his mother, however, were now at an end. During his sojourn at Heidelberg,

his own developed intelligence enabled him to detect, even in her grave and earnest letters, a tone of strong maternal affection, subdued as if by an effort of resolution; and on meeting her again, upon his return from Germany, his strengthened character and greater self-possession gave him courage to indulge in such demonstrations of grateful filial tenderness as served in some measure to thaw the icy self-restraint of the widow. If she had not treated him more fondly during the two months he had spent at Barlingham, she had treated him more openly. She had avowed to him that she was not on friendly terms with his father's family,—not even on friendly terms with her daughter!

"It matters not with whom the fault," said she, in answer to Basil's eager interrogatories. "Suffice it that the Annesley family include the son so dear to me in their displeasure against myself, and are consequently little likely to make overtures of

kindness towards you. Oblige me, therefore, dearest Basil, by abstaining from all further reference to the subject."

On another point she had been equally candid. She informed him that she was poor,—*very* poor ; that her income of eight hundred a year, derived in a great measure from her pension as the widow of a general officer, would only enable her to make him an allowance of three;—that, the little she could lay aside, was forming into a fund for his future promotion; and that necessity, as well as choice, had induced her to make a hermitage of her retreat.

"All my desire,—all my ambition,—dearest Basil," said she, "is your advancement in life. My fate has been a sad one. I was wedded against my inclinations. Your father's family caballed against me while he lived, and cast me off at his death; yet circumstances forbade me to refuse their offer of adopting Helena, for whom, indeed! —but no matter !——My happiness has

been in *you*, Basil; my consolation in *you*. For *you* have I lived; for *you* I hope, and am happy.—Deficient as you may have sometimes fancied me in tenderness, so dear have you ever been to me, that, had I lost you, I would not, I *could* not have survived! In your well-being, my very existence is bound up. Become what I expect of you,—a man,—a man of honour,—a prudent man, endowed with the esteem of society, and my old age may perhaps still enjoy the peace and honour denied to my youth. But falter in the path,—disgrace yourself, and I shall become a widow indeed!"

A warm embrace sealed the compact between them, which Basil long promised himself to hold sacred; and again and again, previous to his embarkation in London life, had poor Lady Annesley dwelt solemnly upon the fact, that, possessing only a life income, should he involve himself in debt, she would be unable to afford him relief.

"Think," she had said to him at parting,

"think, dearest Basil, what would be the distress, the despair, of this tranquil little household, over which the quiet years have been rolling away unfelt, should any mischance befal you! Govern your conduct, my dear son, by the conviction, that disgrace to *you* would convey death to your mother!"

And after all this, with the impression still strong on his mind of the noble dignity of that mild woman, and the strong motherly love mysteriously concealed under her solemn deportment, he had done evil,—he was in debt,—he had already referred himself for relief to the interposition of THE MONEY LENDER!

CHAPTER II.

Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?
SHAKSPEARE.

LONG and tedious did the hours appear to Basil Annesley, which served on the morrow to convey his post-paid letter to the Hungerford Coffee-house, and bring back a reply from the individual so bitterly contemned by his Club.

Three times in the course of the day did he return home to his lodgings, in hopes the post might have brought an answer which, he trusted, would afford a first step of extrication from the difficulties in which he had wantonly involved himself. Still

he was disappointed. On his table were divers notes and letters—some of invitation—some indited with the clerkly precision announcing, only too painfully to the conscious debtor, strong hints that his "earliest convenience," must convey a settlement to some expectant creditor: but not a syllable from A. O.!

In the evening, he had an engagement. One of his brother officers had exacted a promise that he would accompany him to a private box at Covent Garden, as the escort of his mother and sisters; and, just as, full-dressed, but with his spirits in complete dishabille, he was quitting his lodgings to repair to Lady Maitland's box, the double rap of the last evening post caused the door of his small dwelling to vibrate, and Basil to recoil a step or two in the passage, while his servant offered the ignominious twopence in exchange for a shabby-looking missive, which was to convey tidings of life or death to the delinquent.

The interview was accorded. "The following day, at noon;"—the place, obscure and strange enough,—a street in St. Agnes le Clare, Old Street-Road. Basil, however, was as much enchanted as though the rendezvous were assigned, by some delicate hand-writing, in the heart of May Fair; and he proceeded in towering spirits to keep his appointment with the Maitlands.

As he walked towards Arlington-street, where he was to join the party, there rose before his mind's eye a vision which, for some days past, he had sedulously banished; a vision of the low-browed sitting room at the Grange, with its deeply embayed Elizabethan windows and spacious projecting chimney,—its antique furniture and grave aspect,—with the figure of his stern mother in her customary weeds of solemn black, seated in her high-backed ebony chair, with her hands folded upon her knee; again disappointed of the letter from her son, which Dorcas had entered the room to inform her

was not brought back by the little messenger despatched for the twentieth time to Lyndhurst for the purpose of daily inquiry.

"If I can arrange matters, to-morrow, with this fellow," thought Basil, as he hastened lightsomely along, "I will write, to-morrow, to my poor mother. For the last three weeks, I have not dared take up my pen for any ordinary purpose of communication; lest all should end in my being forced to reveal to her the desperate situation in which I have placed myself!—My poor mother!—Even now I dare not think of it!—What treachery!—what infatuation! So self-denying as her life,—so watchful as her maternal vigilance has been—to be thus rewarded! But if I can only prevail upon this damnable A. O. to accept the interest and personal security he took from Blencowe, I might, in the course of the next eighteen months, pay off both debt and interest, and dare once more to look her in the face!"

That night, on their return from the play, Lucy Maitland noticed to her sister and brother that she had never seen Mr. Annesley in such spirits.

"You have often told me your friend could be pleasant enough if he liked," said she, addressing John Maitland; "to-night he was really most agreeable."

"Admit also that his gaiety was well-timed!" observed her elder sister. "Because Miss O'Neill had reduced the whole house to silence and tears, Mr. Annesley scarcely left us a minute's respite from his pleasant anecdotes."——

"Annesley had too much respect for the fashionability of *my* sisters, to fancy they went to the theatre for the sake of anything to be seen there," replied John Maitland, coolly. "He concluded, as I did, that your object was to enjoy our society, in a closer and more incommodious place than your own drawing-room; and rewarded you for submitting to such very hard seats and so

stifling an atmosphere, by talking all the nonsense in his power."

So little impression, meanwhile, had the amusements of the evening made upon Basil, that his first impulse, on returning home, was to take from his pocket the unsightly letter of A. O., in order to ascertain, with greater accuracy, the name of the street to which he was to repair on the morrow. He searched first in one waistcoat-pocket, then in the other, and finally in those of his coat and great-coat, and all with the same infructuous result! In his impatience, he flung down on the table his handkerchief and gloves, his opera-glass, and a small gold pencil-case he carried in his waistcoat-pocket. But this eagerness did not enable him to recover the lost treasure. Not a vestige of his letter!

Though certain of having received it in the hall, and thrust it into his pocket preparatory to leaving the house, he now in the perplexity of vexation, began to open

his desk and dressing-box, in the hope of finding it there; though aware that he had not returned into his sitting-room after the arrival of the post. Still, the result was the same; and he was forced to end with the conclusion which had first presented itself, that his pocket had been picked in coming out of the theatre, and this document, valueless to any but himself, mistaken for higher game.

How irritating!—This trivial occurrence might be the means of deferring the promised interview for four-and-twenty-hours! Nay, A. O. might, perhaps, fancy himself hoaxed by a second application; or, at all events, resent having his time thrown away by waiting at home for one who had no scruple in disappointing him, and refuse a second rendezvous!—He had been told, only too often, that A. O. was not a person to be trifled with!—

He began, accordingly, to ransack his brain for reminiscences of the address con-

tained in the letter. St. Agnes le Clare, Old Street Road, he perfectly remembered; for there was a novelish sound in the first name, a something of Miss Owenson or Mrs. Opie,—singularly discordant with the second:—and, by a memoria-technical process, the impression remained with him. But what was the name of the street? It was that of some noble family. It was not Howard, or Percy, or Paget. It was something connected with Wiltshire—he remembered it had brought Wiltshire into his mind. He would examine the Court Guide, and see whether any streets in the neighbourhood of Old Street Road, appeared to bear reference to Wiltshire.

But alas! the Court Guide disdained all mention of St. Agnes le Clare!—The Court Guide rejected A. O. and all his parish; and poor Basil was launched once more upon his sea of troubles.

Of one thing he was certain. The interview was appointed at noon the following

day; and the latest effort of his determination before he committed his head to a restless pillow, was to repair to Old Street Road, at an early hour next morning, and try whether, by exploring the neighbourhood, he might not accidentally touch the silent chord of memory.

It is not, however, a pleasant thing for a denizen of the West End, to arise from a warm bed at nine o'clock on a misty November morning, and after seeing the opposite shops opened by yawning shopboys, or damsels in curl-papers, and swallowing a hasty comfortless breakfast, for which the baker had not brought the rolls, or the newspaper boy the *Morning Post*, jumble off in a hackney coach towards the far East to be deposited, in a degree of bewilderment worthy of Robinson Crusoe, upon the Pavement of Finsbury.

It was the first time Basil Annesley had visited that *terra incognita*. He had been quartered in the Tower, but knew nothing

of the wilds of Moorgate; and, being far from a dressy man, and on the present occasion attired with especial plainness, could not conceive it possible that the stare bestowed upon him by the aborigines proceeded from the striking difference between the cut of his great-coat and that of the tailors of the Barbican. He fancied that the curiosity he excited must be of the same mysterious nature as that which fixed *his* eager gaze upon every corner of every street, in succession, in the hope of stumbling upon the auspicious dwelling-place of A. O.

It was now only ten o'clock; but in that commercial neighbourhood, the world was in full activity. People were going their ways and executing their business; as if it were a matter of no possible moment that the sun entertained no intention of looking out upon their proceedings. The shop windows were dim with fog. The passers by trudged along with their chilly hands thrust into their pockets, their eyes riveted on the cheerless

pavement, their noses red with cold, and their faces screwed into a grimace, symbolical of the uncheeriness of the weather. The streets were defiled by a thick coating of black greasy mud; and the skies and atmosphere seemed composed of a dilution of the same uninviting material.—Poor Basil's spirits were becoming depressed to the temperature of the day, and the complexion of the objects around him!—

"I fancy I may as well give it up!" muttered he, shrugging his shoulders, after peeping into a variety of streets, whose names brought back no token to his mind. "How I could be such an ass as to trifle with a document of so much importance, is inconceivable!—Had it been one of Esther's letters, I should have hurried back to my room, and locked it in my desk before I went out!"

At that moment, as he was raising his eyes to Heaven in token of wonderment at his own inadvertency, they lighted upon a

name at the turn of the next crossing, which brought an instantaneous flush of colour to his cheeks:—"PAULET STREET!"—Wiltshire for ever!—He had found it!

But no! on examination, the thing was impossible. The street into which he now eagerly hastened his steps, could not be the abode of such a man as the renowned and redoubtable A. O! It was one of those wretched outlets abounding in the suburbs of London, yet scarcely worthy to occupy the valuable territory of metropolitan earth:—a street, of which the first house or two aspires to three stories, the following ones to two, while the others are of the anomalous kind, whereof the roofs maintain a condescending level with the hats of passengers.

This long looked-for Paulet Street, consisted of houses of regular one-windowed frontage and miserable aspect;—the street door nearly as large as the house, and the parlour window closely adjoining it, and partially screened by a ragged and dis-

coloured muslin blind, containing square patches of paper;—in some instances announcing "Lodgings for single men;"—in others, "Manglin' done here;—or, "Wanted a child to dry nurse,"—or, Lighorn bonets cleaned inquire wethin."

In more than one window stood a dead geranium, with its earthen pot standing in a cracked plate, which the hard-working inmate of the house had found no leisure to notice or remove; in one, a bird-cage, not remorselessly exposed, however, to the inclemency of the day, for it contained no bird. The canary, its former inmate, had long been starved to death; and the cage was placed on the window-ledge to be out of the way.

In such neighbourhoods, woman appears to be a more than usually fruitful vine.—Children abound in the street, perhaps because, like the bird-cage, put out of doors to make room within; and on many a door-step sat the dirty ragged sister of twelve years

old, officiating as nurse to the dirty ragged infant of twelve months, whom she fondled, rather with the hope of deriving warmth for herself, than of conferring it on the squalling child.

Basil Annesley turned discomfited away. But that he still felt convinced Paulet Street was the place, he would not have abided a moment in a spot so uninviting. In such a street, the cheer of a passing equipage is unknown: even carts appear to shun its broken pavement. The barrow of the cat's-meat man or knife-grinder, supplies the only rumble of wheels familiar to those miserable flags! A butcher's boy with a tray, or a milk-woman with her pails, would be a pleasant incident in such a place; as inferring that the inhabitants had their turn of food and comfort. But alas! as if *their* time were not more valuable than the time of the rich and idle, *they* are compelled to go in search of those common articles of sustenance, duly brought to the area-gates of wealthy men!

Even the more considerable streets adjoining Paulet Street, not wider indeed, but darker and dingier from the greater altitude of the houses, exhibited samples of trade indicative of the outscourings of civilization:—the old clothes' shop of Nathan the Jew; the shop of the dealer in marine stores, with its rusty iron and "broken flint glass," its wax-ends, and other incongruous perquisites, pickings, and stealings,—the piece-shop, with its harlequinade of shreds and patches,—the rag-shop, with its black-doll suspended from a string before the door, bobbing grotesque curtseys in the wind,—the chandler's, with its wicker-basket of stale eggs, its snuff, tobacco, brown sugar and rush-lights, commingled in unsavoury contact;—or the huckster's with its frost-bitten turnip tops, and sacks of potatoes,—that manna of modern starvation, exemplifying to the pauper-population of our times the virtue of the text, that, "man shall not live by bread alone."

"I might have spared myself this fool's

errand," murmured Basil to himself as, within a door or two of the junction of Paulet Street with one displaying these grander adjuncts, he passed before the cracked door-step of a house, dirtier and more disconsolate-looking, though larger than its neighbours; and so deficient either of ragged muslincur tain, or notice of "manglin'," or "cleanin',"—broken flower-pot, or empty bird-cage,—that it had the air of being uninhabited; the mists upon its filthy windows superseding all necessity for curtains, if, indeed, aught within were calculated to attract the curious eye.

Just, however, as Basil threw a hasty glance upon the streaky pea-green door of No. 11, Paulet Street, it revolved slowly upon its hinges; and lo! there issued forth an old man, spare and stooping, who, but for his decrepit gait, had probably been above the middle size. His hat was napless, his brown great-coat thread-bare; and the worsted gloves drawn over his bony hands

so coarse and cumbrous, that, after fumbling for some time with his key in locking the house-door after him, he dropped it on the step instead of conveying it into his pocket. —His fingers were probably benumbed with cold!

The key fell almost at the feet of Basil; who, perceiving that the poor old man was making sundry efforts to recover it, good-naturedly stooped and placed it in his hand. Unused probably to acts of courtesy, the old fellow made almost as hard an effort to look up into Basil's face with thanks, as he had previously done to reach forth his hand towards his key; and when the eyes of young Annesley and the squalid stranger *did* meet, the impression appeared to be mutually startling. For a moment they stood, their looks steadily fixed upon each other, as though—

> They shared between themselves some separate fate,
> Whose darkness none beside might penetrate.

Even when a few mumbled words of

thankfulness on one part, and civility on the other had passed between them, and they went their several ways, Basil, on turning back for a last view of the strange proprietor of that den of desolation, found that *he*, too, had paused by the way, and was gazing back wistfully upon himself.

It was a relief to return once more to the haunts of a gayer world. Never before had Bond Street appeared so brilliant to Annesley, as when, having alighted in Oxford street from his hackney coach, he hurried back on foot to his lodgings. The prosperous, thriving, well-dressed population of the West End seemed to comfort his eyes.—At Basil's age, it is natural to turn with joy from the spectacle of Lazarus with his sores, to the auspicious prosperity of the man clothed in purple and fine linen!—

"No use to avow my carelessness: I will write as though for the first time, or as though his letter had not reached me," said he, as he prepared to commence a fresh ne-

gotiation with A. O.; and more anxious than ever were the moments that intervened before a second answer was vouchsafed to his application.

It seemed as though the disingenuousness of the Money-lender was to keep pace with his own! Again an appointment was made; but no mention of St. Agnes le Clare, not a syllable about Old Street Road!—A. O. consented to see B. A. on the morrow,—but it was at No. — Greek Street, Soho; and this time, Basil kept a check on his infirmities of memory, by carefully depositing the memorandum in his desk.

The mercury of his elastic nature rose once more in the tube, under the influence of this slight encouragement.—It is amazing in what unsubstantial indications the sanguine find grounds for hope!—As the powers of the microscope convert the green mould of some decaying object into verdant forests and bowers of bliss, the eye of youth discerns promise in the veering of a cloud, and its

buoyant heart dances for joy at the broken strain of distant and unattainable music.

To contend, however, with the dreariness of a London November, requires, on the part of a mere lover of pleasure, the utmost efforts of a sanguine temperament. The Western world seems laid under an interdict; the social frame broken up. No brilliant equipage,—no laughing faces,—no merry balls,—no gaudy crowds,—no gleaming windows lighted up for festivity,—as he dashes along the streets at night. May Fair looks gloomy as if on the eve of a universal interment. The great mansions of the Squares are as closely shuttered as if legions of dead lay coffined within; and the winter aspect of our metropolis is as indicative of depopulation, as the summer ones of every other city in Europe. *We* prefer our woods when leafless, our gardens when bereft of fruits and flowers; and repair from the country to town, just as the former is putting on her robe of beauty,

and the latter becoming insupportable from heat and dust.

"How cursedly boring is all this!"—said Captain Blencowe, shrugging his shoulders, to Basil, whom, later in the day, he persuaded to take a turn with him in his cab in Hyde Park, where they found only a few venerable dowager carriages taking their daily airing, and looking like so many mourning coaches washed with yellow.

"The air is mild this afternoon," replied Annesley, whose bosom's lord was sitting lightly on his throne, as if refreshed by the change of scene.

"*Air?*"—reiterated Blencowe, with contempt,—"thank Heaven, I get my long leave next week, and shall be off to Melton. What is a man to do with himself in town at this time of year?"

"I seldom find my day hang heavy," replied Basil.

"Ay, ay,—*you* are new to it all; you

will tell a different story when you have had as much of it as I have.—I vow to God, I don't know a soul in London at this moment."

"There are the Maitlands, who——"

"The Maitlands!—two marrying girls and a double-marrying mother! By the way, Basil, *you* certainly *do* find occupation for your time! But you keep your own secret.—I suppose it is useless asking what takes you so often to the neighbourhood of South Audley-street.—Well, well! I will say no more about it! I forgot that, at your age, such an inquiry is a leading question, to which your complexion has a prompt reply. Heigho! I wish South Audley, or any other street, contained anything, or any lady, to palliate the accursed dulness of a London winter. The advertisements of the *Times* assure us every other evil is remediable; that there exist cures for the toothache and smoking chimneys;—and patent

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rat-traps and bug-destroyers to his Majesty are daily announced.—If they would only tell one in what part of the metropolis antidotes are sold against *ennui!*"

"They *do!*" observed Basil, pointing laughingly to the vast playbills displayed in red and black variegation at the door of an oilman's shop they were passing in Piccadilly, on their way back to St. James's-street. But at that moment the attention of his companion was attracted towards another object, a plain dark chariot, with the wheel of which their own was nearly locked by a concussion of coal-carts and stage-coaches, opposite Hatchett's. Dexterous coachmanship alone emancipated them from the collision.

"A lucky escape!" cried Blencowe, as his noble horse, roused by the incident, started off towards St. James's-street. "It would have been no joke had I smashed *his* panel."

"Whose panel?"—

"Did you not see *who* was in that carriage?"

"A grave old fellow, who looked like a physician.—*Who* was it?"

"Neither more nor less than the renowned A. O., of whom we were talking the other day at the Club!—"

Basil Annesley started. He almost fancied this might be another of Blencowe's leading questions, addressed to his complexion.

"I feel when I see that man," said Blencowe, with an air of disgust too earnest to be assumed, "as if looking at a rattlesnake in a cage!—I always wonder *who* is to be the next victim! Even if asleep, one knows that the reptile's fangs are brewing their fatal venom; and that some human being may fall a sacrifice to their next mission."

Luckily for Basil, this terrible prognostication escaped him. He was reflecting upon

the absurdity of having gone to seek for the proprietor of that plain but handsome equipage, in the squalid recesses of Paulet-street, St. Agnes le Clare!

The post of the following day brought him a letter from his mother. Lady Annesley appeared unusually depressed. There had been sickness in her household. The old gardener was on his death-bed.

"You may have sometimes found Barlingham desolate enough," wrote the recluse; "but at this moment it is so thoroughly saddened, that I shall exonerate you, my dearest son, from your promised Christmas visit. I would not willingly expose your young heart to the sight of our sorrow, or the hazard of our sickness."

After perusing such a letter, Annesley thanked Heaven he had not followed up his momentary project of avowing his embarrassments to his mother; and set off, with his redoubled eagerness, in pursuit of the Money-lender.

During his sojourn in London, he had probably traversed Greek-street, Soho, fifty times, without noting more than that it contained the usual double lines of tedious unmeaning brick-houses peculiar to English streets;—diversified only by varieties of insurance plates,—the Phœnix, or the Sun Fire,—or exhibiting the interesting F. P., prating of the whereabout of their fire-plugs.

But now, every house appeared instinct with meaning. Its glaziers' or grocers' shops, were not as the shops of other glaziers and grocers; and on arriving within a few doors of the number specified by A. O.'s communication, he began to count the houses, the earlier to familiarize himself with the "complement extern" of the Money-lender's habitation.

It was one of those square roomy mansions, which still announce that Soho was a fashionable quarter of the town, at the moment when the higher classes, taking sudden

fright at the insalubrity of the banks of the river,—(till the reign of the Second James, their favourite residence,)—migrated as far as possible from the influence of its miasma. But though spacious, the house in question was nearly as cheerless to look at as the den in Paulet-street. The windows of its vast frontage were closed by shutters, the paint of which was probably coeval with the edifice, if indeed its complexion could be conjectured through panes of glass so encrusted with the unmolested dust of years, that some winged seed might have taken root in the soil, had the well-trimmed parterres of the adjoining sooty Eden of Soho-square, produced specimens of vegetation so genuine as the thistle.

The door, ill-fitted to its shrunken disjointed case, was of that dingy, ochrous complexion, peculiar to the loungers of the Cheltenham promenades ; and even the worn-out and broken cane-blinds of the parlour were so

closely surmounted by closed shutters, as to preclude all idea that the house was inhabited. It sounded hollow as the grave, when, in spite of appearances, Basil hazarded a modest knock and gentler ring!—

Promptly, however, as at some well-lacqueyed lordly mansion, the summons was answered. An old woman of crippled shape, and having a complexion many degrees darker than her tawny front and the dirty fly-cap that surmounted it, opened, and held wide open, the door, not as if awaiting his inquiries, but as though he were expected, and had only to enter.—A glance at his feet, as hinting a hope that the door-scraper had not been overlooked, was all she vouchsafed him.

"In the back parlour!" croaked her discordant voice, before he had recovered self-possession enough to ask a question; and he saw that he was to make his own way in this desolate temple of echoes.

With his heart beating more irregularly than he would have cared to own to his friend Blencowe, Basil accordingly advanced along the wide but bare and dirty passage, and knocked at the second door, which was slightly ajar. No one replied:—he accordingly pushed it open, and went in.

CHAPTER III.

Let him who wants to know the value of money, try to borrow some.—POPULAR PROVERB.

THE chamber into which Basil had thus unceremoniously introduced himself, though empty, had all the appearance of having been recently occupied. Volumes of sulphurous yellow smoke ascended from a black mass of coals in the rusty grate, interspersed with damp shavings, in token that some effort at least had been made to ignite them; and an old-fashioned bureau standing open against the wall, exhibited files of papers, and one or two open letters, besides a com-

pact phalanx of diminutive rouleaux, apparently of sterling value.

To these objects, however, after a cursory glance round the room, Basil paid not the slightest attention. Throwing himself into a roomy arm chair, of which the horse-hair stuffing protruded at intervals through the well-worn black leather covering, and the channelled mahogany arms promised anything but a pleasant lounge, he contemplated with listless gaze the old fashioned parlour, with its bare boards; whereof the knots stood prominent from the softer level of the wood worn down by much friction, even as the more obstinate defects of a human character become more remarkable when the weaker qualities have subsided under the pressure of years. The walls were of wainscot, diversified by heavy festoons of flowers and fruit, dividing the compartments, and indicating oaken panelling. But the wood being concealed by an ignominious coating of paint which appeared to have

been contending for nearly a century with that yellow London smoke, of which the adjoining fireplace furnished so satisfactory a specimen,—the original richness of effect was lost.

The only object serving by way of decoration to that dingy wainscot, was a paper almanack, nailed up by tacks at the corners, beside the bureau. The only object adorning the floor, was a square of discoloured drugget, constituting a sort of dais that extended from the fireplace beyond the bureau;—a straw chair pushed back from which, had evidently been in recent use.—Such was the official residence of the redoubtable A. O.!—

For some minutes, young Annesley sat motionless, with eyes apparently intent upon the cheerless objects around him, but in reality labouring to resume his self-possession. At length he grew impatient, and started up. But instead of approaching the bureau, containing the only desultory objects

of interest in the room, he took his stand mechanically on the drugget before the fire-place, as though the latter had emitted warmth, or the former comfort. To approach a depository of written papers belonging to another, would have appeared criminal to a mind so honourable. Far better bear the impatience or listlessness of *ennui*, than relieve the tediousness of the moment by a breach of confidence. At last, after exhibiting the ordinary symptoms of youthful petulance,—venting a few ejaculations against the smoky fire-place,—and tapping, first with one foot, then with another, on the sonorous floor, ill covered with that thin and scanty drugget,—he was about to fall with indignation upon the thin green cord serving as bell-rope, in order to summon the old woman in the dirty fly-cap, and ascertain why his dignity was thus trifled with, when lo, just as he had placed his hand upon the string, a slight sound, proceeding from the furthest corner, induced

him suddenly to turn round, and, standing there, as if emitted by the wainscot, he discerned the unknown proprietor of that dreary apartment. One of the carved panels probably concealed a door through which he had, unobserved, effected his entrance.

Involuntarily, Basil advanced towards the new-comer, as though it were *his* business to do the honours of the place. But when within a few paces of his host, who stirred not a step to meet him, the young man stopped short,—startled out of all self-possession by a single glance at the figure that presented itself to his observation!—

There was nothing, however, very remarkable in the person of A. O.—Though above the middle height, a certain ignoble character of form and gesture deprived him of the advantages usually inseparable from a commanding stature. His dress, if neither coarse nor rusty, was of an inferior cut; and though his dark eyes might have passed for intelligent in the head of any other man,

there was a discrepancy between the blackness of their tint, enhanced by the profuse black eyelashes and eyebrows by which they were overhung, and the scanty grey curls, almost approaching to white, that figured on either side a head, the crown of which was bare and lustrous. It was, in short, a face and figure, which, in squalid attire, with a beard and a slouched hat, would have passed muster among the itinerant dealers in old clothes, whose cries disturb the inhabitants of the West End, at an hour when none but Jews, fish-women, chickweed boys, scavengers' carts, and twopenny postmen, are astir in the slumberous streets of the more civilized quarters of the town.

It was not, however, the Israelitish type of the individual before him, which arrested the courtesies of Basil Annesley. From the first, he had heard A. O. classed among "the Jews," and expected nothing better than to find the outward man of the Money-lender accordant with that inward specifica-

tion. His amazement arose solely from the discovery, that the decently-attired and robust man before him was no other than the threadbare and decrepit individual whose key he had restored to him in Paulet-street, St. Agnes le Clare—though as different in form and seeming as both the one and the other from the well-dressed gentleman in the brown chariot, pointed out to him by Captain Blencowe, in Piccadilly, as the great and influential A. O.

Startled and shocked by a transmutation so little short of magical, young Annesley became perplexed and incoherent in the exordium to which he now attempted to give utterance. He scarcely knew whether it would be better to announce or pass over his discovery. It was essential to him to propitiate the Money-lender. Was this desirable object likely to be accomplished by the detection and development of one of those strange mysteries, in which it seemed his pleasure to envelop his proceedings?

While Basil was still debating, within himself, this urgent point, the singular master of that singular house keeping his eye fixed upon the intruder with the same scrutinizing interest which had marked their first encounter, relaxed the spasm of catalepsy into which his sudden apparition appeared to have startled his visitor, by advancing towards the bureau, abruptly turning round the straw-chair placed before it, and, while appropriating it to his own use, motioning to Basil to resume the great elbow-chair in which he had already ensconced himself. His first words decided the question which still agitated the mind of young Annesley.

"Unless I am mistaken, young man," said he, coolly, "we have met before?"—

"And so recently, that I can scarcely account for my own uncertainty on the subject," was Annesley's frank rejoinder. "Yet there is so little analogy between——"

"Fine feathers make fine birds,—foul

feathers foul ones," interrupted A. O. in the same hard but measured voice, looking down as he spoke upon the sleeve of a coat which, unless in a smoky back parlour in Soho, could scarcely have pretended to the designation of fine.

"I had, however, little suspicion," he resumed, "that in the gay young gentleman who took compassion on the predicament of a bungling old man, the other morning, I beheld the identical B. A., an appointment with whom had enticed me, in inclement weather and to no purpose, to that remote quarter of the town."

"The distance was as inconvenient to me as to yourself," replied Annesley, recovering his self-possession under the influence of his discovery that the man before him was either an impostor or a mountebank. "It was *you*, Sir, who wrote to me, assigning another house than your own for our interview."

"I have houses in various quarters of

the town," replied the Money-lender, unabashed by his retort;—"in St. James's, to transact my business with spendthrift lords, and lend my aid towards patching the ragged vesture of fools of quality;—in Finsbury, for such as honour me by an appeal to my strong-box, but not with the disclosure of their names.—It is my rule to place confidence only in those who shew confidence in *me*."

"In addressing myself to one known to me only by the initials of A. O., I did not feel bound to disclose more than my own of B.A.!" replied the young soldier, gravely.

"Mine are pretty universally known to express my real name," replied the Money-lender. "I am called Abednego Osalez. And now permit me to inquire your motive for repairing to so obscure and troublesome a quarter of the town for the despatch of business which your letter described as pressing,—yet, after all, leaving it undone?"

"May I first inquire in my turn," replied Basil, encouraged rather than daunted by his *sang froid*, "why, after sending me on that occasion to the extremity of the city, you condescend, on my second application, (conceived in precisely the same terms,) to receive me here?"

"Perhaps," replied the Money-lender, evidently in good conceit with the client who had unwittingly obliged him under his garb of misery,—"perhaps, because your carelessness on *that* occasion induced me to suppose your exigencies less urgent than I had implied from the terms of your original letter. The man who could afford to wait, had claims to higher consideration. And now, I am surely entitled to as frank an answer!"

The double mystery was now succinctly and readily explained. From Basil's avowal of having had his pocket picked, the Money-lender probably deduced an inference that it was because, unused to be the depository

of valuable effects, he was thus careless; for his momentary good humour seemed overcast. Perhaps, however, he was merely vexed at finding himself detected in a garb so unseemly by a new customer.

"This is the first time, I fancy, we have done business together?" said he, starting from his reverie, and abruptly addressing young Annesley, who replied by an affirmative bow.

"And do you bring me no letter of recommendation from some other of my clients?"

"From no one!—" he replied, spontaneously recalling to mind the unsatisfactory terms in which the very clients on whom he pinned his reliance, treated him in his absence.

"It is merely my newspaper advertisements, then, which have attracted your notice?"—

"Not altogether," replied Annesley. "More than one of my brother officers have been extricated from pecuniary dif-

ficulty by your assistance.—From them, I became aware of your modes of business; and——"

"Did they not also add," interrupted the Money-lender, "their exhortations that you should *not* apply to *me*, unless your case were desperate? Did they not tell you, 'if any other earthly resource be open to you, beware of A. O.?' Did they not call me shark, cormorant, vulture, usurer, JEW?—You know they did!—Not a mess of any regiment in the service in which I am not thus opprobriated!"—

Basil, who already repented his indiscretion, in having allowed the words "brother officers" to escape him, as too clearly indicative of his social position, would not, by an affirmative reply, hazard the exposure of his friends to the vindictive reprisals of such an enemy as A. O.

"You are cautious, young gentleman!" observed the Money-lender, whose large dark eyes seemed to penetrate the most

hidden thoughts of his companion. "Caution, however, is not the parent of confidence. You come to *me* in the hope of opening my strong box; and will scarcely accomplish the exploit with close lips and a closer heart. A calling such as mine necessitates some degree of mystery; but when once a *bona fide* negotiation commences, all must be above-board—all truth and daylight. I have told you my name is Abednego Osalez —I now ask the favour of your own?"—

Still, Basil hesitated. He could not bear to disgrace the honourable patronymic borne by the object of his filial veneration, by inscription in the registers of a Jew!

"You will be pleased to remember," resumed the Money-lender, "that no act can be authentic between us, unless the business be negotiated under our real names. If, therefore, you scruple to entrust me with yours, this interview has lasted too long already."

Apprehending, from his decided mode of uttering these words, that the peremptory

Jew was about to rise and dismiss him, the agitated applicant murmured, in a low voice, "My name, Sir, is Annesley."

"*Annesley?*" — reiterated the Money-lender, as if requiring him to be more articulate.

"Basil Annesley!"—

The Jew rose with some precipitation from his seat; and, for a moment or two, occupied himself in turning over the papers lying open on his bureau, as if in search of writing materials, to enable him to take notes of the business of his new client.

"You have lately, I believe, entered the Grenadier Guards?"—said he, still addressing Annesley, but without turning round.

"I have been rather more than a year in the army."

"And during that short space of time, you have contrived to embarrass yourself?"

"Many contrive to do so in less than a twentieth part of it!"—replied Basil, as if resolved not to be brow-beaten by a stranger.

"Not the well-conditioned son of a mother

in straitened circumstances," replied the insolent Jew, who seemed endowed with an intuitive insight into the position of his new client.

"I applied to you, Sir, as a Money-lender, not as a counsellor,"—said Basil, haughtily, now rising in his turn. "My business may be briefly explained,—I am, as you seem to be aware, the only son of the late Sir Bernard Annesley. I have immediate necessity for a sum of three hundred and fifty pounds. My allowance of three hundred a year——"

"She allows you three hundred a year, then?—Too much!—too much for *her* to give, or you to receive!" muttered the Jew, in indistinct tones, of which, however, not a syllable escaped the ear of Annesley.

"I observed, Sir, that my allowance of three hundred a year, and my pay," persisted Basil, not noticing his interruption, "would enable me to pay you off, by monthly instalments, both interest and principal, in the course of the next two years and a half."

"And should you die in the interim, young gentleman, what security have I, pray, for my money?"—demanded the usurer, with a sneer.

"Surely I could effect an insurance on my life,—assigning *you* the policy?" inquired Basil, in a less assured voice.

"You have very soon become familiar with the expedients of an embarrassed man!"—murmured the Jew,—still without turning towards him, but apparently engrossed by the arrangement of the papers on his bureau.

"I was informed by a brother officer that such was the mode in which you had arranged a similar matter for himself," replied Basil, with increasing hesitation.

"Captain Blencowe, eh?—Ay! I remember. Six years ago, however!—Your friend has a good memory,—so have I: and I admit that he redeemed the debt like a gentleman, some time within the term of his acceptance."

"I should be glad to convince you that you would obtain in myself a client equally honourable," rejoined Basil, somewhat reassured.

"The will may not be wanting, but I doubt the means. Young Blencowe belonged to a moneyed family.—I knew with whom I had to deal.—Were *you* to fail me, I might put the whole Annesley family into thumbscrews, without eliciting so much as a ten-pound note in your behoof. Persons of my occupation, Sir, are forced to keep a pretty accurate tariff of the fortunes and consciences of those likely to come within their line of business. I had a relative of yours, (one of the Yorkshire Annesleys,) two years in the King's Bench at my expense."

"But I conclude he paid you at last?" demanded Basil, too ignorant of the connexionships of his father's family, to refute any such accusation.

"With his life.—He died in prison,

leaving me the creditor of heirs who were penniless!"—

Strange to tell, there was a tone of triumph rather than of vexation, in the Money-lender's mode of alluding to this frustration of his interests.

"But I, who am both young and solvent," persisted Basil, "do not intend to defraud you, either by living or dying.—I give you my word of honour as a gentleman, that——"

"The word of honour of a gentleman, has no value, and should have no mention, in a money-dealing transaction,"—interrupted the Jew.—"The affair between us is simply one of speculation.—You want money;—I have to sell it to you, as much as possible to my own advantage.—I must therefore either have good security and fair interest;—or, without security, such interest as may induce me to incur the risk."

"I have already offered you the latter alternative," said Basil, bluntly.

"I have been offered two hundred per cent. by needy men before now!" replied the Money-lender, with a curl of the lip, "and without swallowing the bait. The mere promise of a stranger is not exactly worth its weight in gold. In the first place, Mr. Annesley, have you even so much as reflected upon the amount of the interest of your debt, and keeping up the policy of insurance, besides the expense of the execution of the deed, added to the sinking fund for the gradual defrayment of the three hundred and fifty pounds?"—demanded the pragmatical Jew.

"I am in the receipt of four hundred and thirty pounds a-year," replied Basil, evasively.

"And for what purpose is it assigned you?" retorted the Money-lender. "To afford you a becoming position in the world! —What right, therefore, have you to alienate this provision, so as to deprive yourself of the necessaries of your sphere of society,

and become exposed to the shame of petty embarrassments?"—

"None!" replied Basil, astounded at the inexplicable liberties taken by his new acquaintance, yet not daring to resent remonstrances apparently indicative of favourable dispositions towards him. "But the shame to which I may expose myself by the limitation of my income, is surely nothing compared with that which would befal me a month hence, when my acceptances fall due, and I am unable to do them honour!"—

"But you are still a minor?" remonstrated the Jew.

"Those who were satisfied with my endorsements, asked no questions, contenting themselves with the engagement of a gentleman, the son of a man of honour," replied Basil, with firmness.

At that moment, the Money-lender accidentally let fall a paper he held in his hand; and the mechanical courtesy with which Basil started forward to assist him in reco-

vering it, probably tended to recal to the recollection of A. O. the kindness displayed by the young Guardsman towards the old pauper of Paulet Street; for, on turning to receive it from his extended hand, the countenance of the Jew had relaxed into a more Christian-like expression.

"At least," said he, after receiving the paper, and fixing his dark eyes approvingly upon the ingenuous countenance of young Annesley—"at least, there was value received for these bills of exchange?—You are not applying to me for the means of covering another usurious transaction?—Do not deceive me, young Sir; for, through my extensive connexions with the moneyed world, I have the means of ascertaining the truth to a guinea."

"I have no disposition to deceive you, Mr. Abednego Osalez," replied young Annesley, with some hauteur; "but if I came not hither to seek a counsellor, still less am I disposed to find a confessor in my man of

business. The purpose for which I require these funds, regards you as little as the mode by which you have acquired them so as to enable you to supply me regards myself. I ask no questions:—let me advise you to be equally discreet."

"There is no occasion for *you* to ask questions!"—said his singular companion, continuing to examine his papers, and file them carefully, all the time he was speaking. "They are answered for *you* without inquiry. The world has explanations stereotyped to your hand. Everybody knows the Money-lender to be a Jew,—the Jew, a usurer,—the usurer, a criminal in the eye of the law. Christ drove the money-changers from his Temple—man expels them from his tribunals.—The money-lending Jew is one who *must* have acquired his funds by extortion and fraud;—one who probably began life as a corsair—pickpocket—resurrection man—assassin,—no matter what amount of obloquy you heap upon his head!

—He cannot have too narrowly escaped the hands of the hangman!—He cannot be too grossly stigmatized, he has caused the ruin of thousands—

> And if a man have need of poison now,
> Here lives the caitiff wretch would sell it him!

Admit that I portray myself as you have heard me portrayed?—Why, therefore, *should* you institute *further* inquiries into my conduct or its motives?"—

Basil Annesley was startled out of all self-possession by this strange appeal. From the first few words uttered by his new acquaintance, he had been impressed by the superiority of his tone and phraseology not only to his garb and mode of life, but to a calling affording inducements for such base disguisal as that which had first brought them into collision; but now, the unexpected eloquence of his words and sudden energy of his gestures, were characteristic of the scholar and the gentleman, rather than of the vulgar Jew—the jobbing money-

broker!—Poor Basil almost quailed under the vivid glances of the excited man who gave utterance to this petulant apostrophe.

"I have, I admit, heard you ungraciously spoken of," said he, with a degree of frankness rivalling that of his interlocutor. "That what was told me exercised no very important influence over my opinions, may be inferred from my presence here."

"You are here simply because your position is desperate!" coolly rejoined A. O. "You are here because there is no hope elsewhere. You may also perhaps, have heard from Captain Blencowe, and other victims who have escaped without serious injury from my clutches, that even the crocodile of the shores of Pactolus is sometimes moved to a caprice of pity, and are willing to try whether anything in your youth and inexperience may reach his milder mood."

"My youth and inexperience at least encourage you to trifle with me!" cried Basil, with a rising colour, more enraged by

the ironical smile pervading the countenance of A. O., than by his mere words. And, having snatched his hat from the window-seat, he was preparing without ceremony to quit the room.

"In all money-dealings, Mr. Annesley," said his companion, undismayed by this tacit threat of breaking up the conference, "you will find the command of your own temper five per cent. in your favour. You cannot afford to quarrel with me. At this moment, I am the necessary evil that must redeem you from the still greater of immediate dishonour. Do me the favour, Sir, to sign this paper," said he, placing in the hands of Basil, one which, during their conference, he had been quietly preparing. "It is, as even *your* slight knowledge of business must assure you, of no legal value. It is the obligation of a gentleman, and must derive its sole importance from a gentleman's signature. It will neither enable me to imprison my debtor nor molest him;

but it will remind Sir Bernard Annesley's son, that, within three years after attaining his majority, he has engaged to pay me back a sum of four hundred pounds; whereof the interest, at five per cent. shall be quarterly forthcoming."

Basil took the promissory note into his hands, and seeing that it was phrased strictly according to the announcement of A. O., conceived himself well off at having so small a bonus as fifty pounds demanded of him as the penalty of the transaction. But what was his amazement when, on taking his place at the bureau, to sign the paper, he found lying before him, a printed cheque of one of the first banking houses of the West End, bearing the signature Abednego Osalez, and directing the firm in question to "Pay to Mr. Annesley or bearer the sum of four hundred pounds!"

Scarcely able to believe the evidence of his eyes,—his cheeks flushed by the excitement of the moment,—his heart throbbing

almost to agony with the consciousness of release from the first great embarrassment of his life, Basil, ere he accepted one document or executed the other, was eager to express his astonishment and gratitude to one whom he could scarcely regard in any other light than that of a benefactor; but on turning round for the purpose, he found that A. O., instead of remaining behind his chair to watch his proceedings, was engaged at the door in earnest colloquy with the unsightly crone, who officiated as his clerk of the presence.

"Tell him I am engaged,—say it is impossible for me to see him this morning!" said the Money-lender, in the imperative tone he had assumed in the earlier part of his colloquy with Basil.

"I have told him so already, Sir," croaked the old woman, "but he will not be denied. He has got out of his cabriolet, and is standing on the door-steps awaiting."

"*Let* him wait!" said the Money-lender. "If he persist in coming in, show him into

the front parlour, and open one of the shutters, till I am ready to receive him.—You perceive, Mr. Annesley, that I am waited for. Spare me therefore the effusions of thankfulness I see expanding upon your lips," resumed A. O., turning towards Basil, who stood transfixed beside the bureau, the cheque in one hand, and the promissory note in the other.

"Have you signed it?"—continued he, pointing to the latter document. "Be quick, if indeed you have carefully perused the terms. Never, while you live, put your name to a paper, of which you have not, to a syllable, mastered the contents. Nay,—spare me your declarations of confidence: you may have less grounds for gratitude than you suppose. Remember the fable of the little fish thrown back into the river to become a bigger, by the wary angler. Be not too sure that the Money-lender is not facilitating your first ingress into his net, in order to secure your return."

Basil Annesley, who had now both read and signed the promissory note, and placed the printed cheque in his pocket-book, smiled at this sinister prognostication.

"I do not choose you to be ruined by anybody but myself," observed the Money-lender with a smile: "in proof of which, let me advise you to place that pocket-book in a securer place than the one from which you own my letter of appointment to have been subtracted. Above all, deposit, this very morning, the money you are about to receive, with your own banker, so as to be ready for the exigencies which——well, well! I will spare you my lecture!"—said he, interrupting himself when he saw the colour rising into the cheeks of Basil. "You receive sterling advice, I perceive, less thankfully than sterling coin."

"The gentleman is in the parlour, Sir," said the old woman, again thrusting in her dingy face and still dingier cap.

"So much the better," replied the Money-

lender, with a bitter sneer. "It may serve to bring so fine a gentleman to his senses, to make acquaintance with the mice and spiders of my desolate habitation."

In another moment, Basil Annesley, still misdoubting whether he were awake or asleep, had shaken hands with the new acquaintance who had acted by him the part of an old friend; and was once more in the street.

A few paces before him, was leisurely proceeding a plain but handsome cabriolet, of which the tiger who held the reins wore a plain undress livery. But the horse of which the little fellow was in charge was not to be mistaken! It was one renowned in the glories of Hyde Park;—a celebrated cab, announcing that the fine gentleman just then cooling his heels in the dismantled dining-room of A. O. was no less a person than—his grace the Duke of Rochester.

CHAPTER IV.

My spirits leap aloft like sparkling waters
Flung from a fountain—buoyant—free—and filling
The common air with freshness.—MARLOWE.

THAT day was a day of overflowing joy to Basil Annesley! Had the pavement, intervening between Soho Square and St. James's Street, been tesselated with gems, after the fashion of the sanctuaries of the Alhambra or Aladdin's palace, instead of displaying the half-frosty, half-filthy flagstones of one of the least inviting quarters of the West End, he could not have felt more elated, or have made his way more lightsomely of foot, than on his road to Herries and Farquhar's,—where, after re-

ceiving his four hundred pounds, he paid the first half-year's interest thereon in advance, to the account of Abednego Osalez, Esq., in order that, for twelve months to come, he might be conscience-clear on the subject.

Let him who, after labouring under the pressure of pecuniary embarrassments, has ever found himself suddenly and unexpectedly released from thraldom, declare whether any earthly triumph can exceed that soul-stirring emancipation!—

> The king may make a belted knight,
> A marquis, duke, and a' that—

but, far surpassing any creation recorded in the peerage, is that of a free man, out of a wretch on whose shoulder the gripe of the bailiff has been felt by agonizing anticipation!

As regarded Annesley's feelings, he was now out of debt; for he was in debt only within limit of his means. Four and twenty hours before, he had looked forward

to the dreadful 28th of December, which was to find him in possession of three hundred pounds, or steep him in shame to the very lips, as a criminal to the day of execution. He would not have felt half so overjoyed at being declared heir-apparent to the Duke of Rochester, as to know that four hundred pounds were that day placed to his credit at Coutts's.

How little,—how very little,—do those real potentates of modern times, who sway the destinies of nations and individuals with a rod of gold, and issue their decrees in bank notes and Exchequer bills, — the bankers of money-spinning Europe,—conjecture the fearful nature of the passions imprisoned in that Pandora's box, their iron safe;—the world of magic spells, compassed within the simple parchment covers of the books of their constituents;—the fiat of life and death occasionally inscribed on one of the printed cheques which their clerk mechanically cashes, enregistering the number

of the notes he gives in exchange with as cool deliberation as though the heart of the expectant "bearer" throbbed not with ecstasy at the sight of those bringers of glad tidings to his necessitous household?—The whole romance of civilization is in fact comprised within the magic initials of L. S. D. MONEY is indeed Power!—the "Open Sesame" to the seemingly impervious rock of human destiny!—Of all the masquerading guises in which false Philosophy loves to parade herself, contempt of MONEY, the ladder by which almost every earthly advantage is attainable, is surely the most absurd!

Poor Basil, among the rest, had often blazoned forth his contempt of riches; labouring to reconcile his mother to her straitened means by assurances of his indifference to the dross of this world; nay, had even deceived *himself* by frequent protestations of indifference to the gorgeous gew-gaws of opulence.—He fancied himself content—nay, proud and happy—to be poor,

yet the possession of a paltry four hundred pounds, was driving him half out of his wits for joy!—

For though the origin of his embarrassments was of a nature far from dishonouring to his head or heart, it was one he dared not have disclosed to his austere mother. Almost, indeed, would he have preferred to pass in her eyes for the dupe of the gaming-table, or for a frivolous spendthrift, ruined by idle extravagance, than expose the truth.

Not one guinea of the money had been applied to his own use. The necessities of another had caused him to pledge his honourable name beyond his power of redemption. And yet, he had not even enjoyed the happiness of claiming sympathy from that other in his embarrassment. He had been forced to pretend opulence at the moment of signing the bills of exchange, and indifference on the subject ever since, lest the obligation should afflict the delicate and high-minded individual whom his interference had been

the means of rescuing from the utmost extremity of distress.

There was only one drawback on his exulting happiness: his mother's illness! Even this, however, was less acutely felt than when sinking under the apprehension that his difficulties might shortly aggravate the evil; and now, disregarding her prohibition, and forestalling his purposed Christmas visit, he readily obtained a few days' leave of absence; and, armed with a thousand little tokens of kindness for the invalids, hurried to Barlingham. Instead of affording Lady Annesley time to renew her prohibition, he chose to take her by surprise.

Few are the contingencies iu this world which justify taking people by surprise. Husbands and wives have often had to rue the officious affection which impelled them prematurely into each other's presence; and the best household, the best school, the most

united family, the most attached circle of friends, cannot be too accurately apprised of the exact moment at which the absent one is likely to rush once more into their arms.

Poor Basil reached the Grange, his whole heart overflowing not simply with the milk of human kindness, but with its cream. Late in the evening he reached Lyndhurst by the coach; and, preferring to restore circulation to his chilly limbs by a walk of a mile and a half across the fields, to a three miles' jumble in a postchaise, through one of the most unsatisfactory lanes that ever besloughed the wagon of the despairing farmer, he accepted the offer of a countryman to accompany him with his *valise*, and cheerfully cut across to Barlingham by a way familiar to him from boyhood.

To beguile the dreariness of his lonely walk, he almost unconsciously burst forth

into a song, the produce of one of the olden poets.

Truce to thy fond misgivings,
These fruitless tears give o'er,
No absence can divide us, love,
No parting part us more!
Mountains and seas may rise between,
To mock our baffled will;
But heart in heart, and soul in soul,
We bide together still.

Where'er I go, or far or near,
I cannot be alone;
Thy voice is ever in mine ear,
Thy hand press'd in mine own;
Thy head upon my pillow rests,
Thy words my bosom thrill,
And heart in heart, and soul in soul,
We bide together still.

And when stern Death shall work his worst,
And all our joys are done,
E'en by the mystery that unites
The dial and the sun,
Though one exist in heavenly bliss,
One in this world of ill,
Yet heart in heart, and soul in soul,
We'll bide together still.

But, as his voice died away, the loneliness seemed drearier than before. The weather

was frosty. Not a breath was stirring; the moon had risen; and, under its influence, and that of the bitterness of the weather, the landscape exhibited a ghastly and death-like appearance. The fields were free from all transit of living thing; not so much as a plough left upturned in the furrows, for the readier re-commencement of the morrow's labours, as at more propitious seasons of the year—not so much as a stoat, or urchin, stealing in quest of midnight prey from hedge to hedge.

When, at last, Basil came in view of the Grange, standing black and desolate in the moonlight, in the centre of its open square of dark and leafless trees, it was like approaching the uninhabited castle of some fairy tale. Not a dog to give tongue at sound of their intruding steps, as they crossed the little bridge leading from the moat to the chief entrance; and, lest Lady Annesley should be alarmed by the

unwonted sound of the door-bell at so late an hour, her son made his way round to the postern leading to the offices, and entered the kitchen with a degree of humility most vexatious to his temporary esquire of the body, who had anticipated that, in escorting to the Grange the heir-apparent of the family, he should force a triumphal entry, drums beating and colours flying. Basil's hurried injunction to the two astonished women servants, who screamed aloud on beholding him, to take care of his valise and its bearer, while *he* made his way into the hall, scarcely reconciled poor Hodge to the indignity of stealing into the house, like a thief, in the dark.

Leaving the Hampshire bumpkin to the consolations of a blazing fire and substantial supper, young Annesley seized the candle presented by the blushing, curtseying handmaiden of old Dorcas, from whom he had already extracted that his mother and her

waiting-woman were in attendance upon old Nicholas, who had been removed to a bed-room on the first floor, having, it was feared, not many days to live.

"My lady has ordered tea in half an hour in her sitting-room," added the damsel. "Shall I acquaint her, Sir, that you are here?—or would you rather I should go and make a fire, Mr. Basil, in your own room?"

Young Annesley accepted the latter alternative. Unwilling to startle the dying man by too sudden an appearance in his chamber, he determined to await the coming of his mother in her own apartment.

The sitting-room usually occupied by Lady Annesley during the winter months was a small chamber on the first floor, adjoining her bed-room. The ceiling, as in all the rooms in the Grange, was not only low, but traversed and deformed by heavy beams; and the floor, of stucco, or

composition. Such a chamber, however, its embayed windows being thickly curtained, and its floor concealed by a carpet, is more easily rendered warm and comfortable for the long cheerless winter evenings than one of nobler proportions; and the rich saloons of many a lordly castle might have found scope for envy, during that bitter weather, in the little snuggery to which, when Basil made his way into the sanctuary, a blazing wood fire was affording the cheerful glow so welcome to the eye of the benighted traveller.

This room was, of all the house, the one least familiar to Basil. It was four years since he had spent a winter at the Grange. His return from Germany had chanced in the summer season; and the preceding Christmas, having recently joined his regiment, he had been forced to pass in town. During his holidays, Lady Annesley usually inhabited her drawing-room on the ground-

floor, as containing her musical instruments, and the book-cases calculated to afford amusement or instruction to her son; and it was only on occasion of some brief interview between them, that she ever received him in what she called her dressing-room, though the ceremonies of her simple toilet were performed in the sleeping-room adjoining. It possessed, accordingly, all the charm of prohibition in the eyes of young Annesley. It was the blue chamber of the Grange,—the only one into which he was not permitted to penetrate uninvited.

On the present occasion, he felt privileged. His visit was as the return of the prodigal son; and he chose to anticipate the favours reserved for such an incident. Moreover, Hannah had informed him that the only fire then burning was in my lady's room; and the temperature of that December night was so little to be trifled with, that he entertained no scruple about invading the forbidden precincts.

"I don't wonder my mother is so fond of it!" was Basil's ejaculation, as, stationed upon the Persian rug before the fire, he cast his eyes round the cheerful chamber, in which Lady Annesley had judiciously assembled such remnants of antique furniture as she had found at the Grange;—the old carved chairs and tables, and a twisted legged cabinet or two, imparting to the place the Elizabethan character he had recently observed in London, as the height of the fashion. From the carved ebony desk, on which Lady Annesley's handkerchief was still lying, to the *priedieu*, in a recess near the fire-place, which was fitted up as an oratory, everything was so strictly in keeping as the bower-chamber of a ladye-fair of the sixteenth century, that it might have served as a study for Cattermole, or as the boudoir of sweet Anne Page!—

"And yet what utter solitude,—what isolation from her caste and kind!" was his

second reflection, on recalling to mind that this snuggery, so charming as a retreat from the severity of a winter's night, was Lady Annesley's abode from year's-end to year's-end, season after season! "A woman must have either a very good, or a very bad conscience, to find her happiness in such complete alienation from society."

That the former alternative was the origin of his beloved mother's retreat, was so naturally his conviction, as to excuse the second conjecture, though breathed only to himself; and regarding that elegantly antiquated room rather as the oriel of a lady abbess than as the boudoir of a woman of the world, Basil did new homage to the excellent taste which had converted the desolate walls of an old farm-house into a retreat so enviable.

It was not with him *there*, however, as in the den of the Money-changer. He felt it no treachery to examine, more leisurely than

his mother's presence on the spot had ever yet enabled him, the objects around him. They were part and parcel of his mother, even as he, her only son, was a portion of herself; and the time must come, though he had never hazarded the anticipation, when they would become his own.

In the tediousness, therefore, of waiting for Lady Annesley's appearance, he cast his eyes from the heavy Persian carpets muffling the floor, to the bronze lamp, brightening every nook of the antiquated chamber. On the chimney ledge of carved Portland stone, against which he was leaning, stood two old agate chalices of great beauty; and between them, on a slab of green jasper, an antique bronze of considerable value, though exhibiting only an unsightly reptile, formed of that matchless metal of Corinth, of which all modern imitations fail to acquire the glowing tinge, arising from the admixture of the more precious metals in the outpourings

of the rich old city, from whose burning ruins fused forth the metal unwittingly created by the spoliating hands of man.

On the wall opposite the fire-place, hung a fine portrait, well known to artists as one of the *chef d'œuvres* of Sir Joshua: a likeness of Lord L., the father of Lady Annesley, wearing the numerous foreign orders commemorative of the distinctions of his diplomatic career. A marble statuette of a child, on an isolated pedestal of giallo antico, filled one corner of the room (the others being completed with hanging shelves of carved ebony, filled with books); a female child, of exquisite grace and beauty, evidently the work of a first-rate hand, which Basil fancied he had heard whispered by Dorcas in his boyhood, as an early portrait of his sister, Mrs. Vernon.

All these objects he had noticed before. But upon Lady Annesley's desk lay a square book, covered with dark velvet, and having

golden clasps of great beauty aud value, like the mass-books of wealthy Catholics, inducing the renewal of a suspicion he had sometimes entertained, that his mother was secretly attached to a faith which was that neither of her husband nor her ancestors.

Curious to determine whether it were, indeed, a *livre d'heures*, he opened the clasps; when, to his utter surprise, he found that the seeming book was a picture case, containing on one side the enamelled portrait of a man—on the other, also under a glass, a lock of glossy hair, of raven blackness.

Basil stood utterly confounded. His late father, as he knew from portraits and from tradition, was fair as a German. His grandfather, Lord L., seemed to be now looking him in the face, in attestation that *he* had no affinity with the individual depicted in that mysterious miniature. Lady Annesley was one of three daughters—his coheiresses;

nor, as well as Basil could recal to mind, had she a single male relation near enough to account for his picture being in her possession. What was the meaning of all this ? He fixed his eyes searchingly upon the portrait, as if to interrogate its right and title to be found in his mother's keeping.

The face was one of more interest than regular beauty: dark, high browed, having a profusion of black hair, and eyes that derived a deeper shade from the reflection. The mouth was of rare beauty, yet unpleasing expression, being tempered by an infusion of scorn little in accordance with the mournful character of the eyes; and, on the whole, it was one of those countenances which fascinate the attention even while impressing the beholder with an unfavourable opinion of the original. The age of the person represented could not exceed five-and-twenty, and the dress was that worn

by English gentlemen at the commencement of the reign of George III.

The more the attention of Basil became riveted upon the picture, the stronger was his impression that some mysterious interest must be connected with an object, which he had attained the age of twenty years without perceiving in his mother's possession. In his boyish days, in those holydays of affection when the secret treasures of a mother are brought forth to amuse a sick child or console an afflicted one, he had often been allowed to admire the contents of his mother's cabinets;—curious shells, rare minerals, antique rings, the old fashioned repeater, with its massive chain and enamelled gew-gaws. Nay, there was a valuable miniature of Lady Annesley's mother, the Lady L., in her black-lace hood and point stomacher, set in diamonds and enamel, with an L. and coronet flourished in seed-pearls upon the braid of hair forming

the reverse, which had actually been allowed him as a plaything, in the convalescence succeeding a dangerous illness.—Yet of the miniature in the velvet cover, he had never been suffered to obtain a glimpse!—

He had just replaced it on the desk and himself upon the hearth rug, when the door was deliberately opened, and Lady Annesley made her appearance.

Prepared to find her as gratified by his visit as he was pleased with his own alacrity in paying it, Basil was moved almost to awe, by the rigid coldness of her mode of receiving him. After rebuking his disobedience in being there, she coolly informed him that, with dangerous illness in her household, his presence would be an inconvenience.

"In that case, I will be off to-morrow," replied Basil, trying to recover, or conceal his chagrin. "But, at least, dearest mother, forgive me so far as to bear with me this one night. I could not endure the anxiety

of supposing you ill, without bringing my own eyes to verify the state of your health."

"Another time, honour me with your confidence so far as to believe that I tell you the exact truth," said Lady Annesley, sternly. "I have been ill.—I am well again,—unless, indeed, the vexation of being thus broken in upon, should produce a recurrence of my indisposition."

While expressing his hopes that he might not have so great an evil on his conscience, Basil saw the eyes of his mother wander from his face to the desk, and from the desk back again to his varying countenance; as if trying to decipher whether he had found time to examine the scattered contents of her chamber, or open the portrait.—The confusion painted in Basil's face, was, however, just as likely to arise from her ungracious mode of reception, as from consciousness of having indulged a prying curiosity; and she remained lost in perplexity.

The entrance of Hannah with the rich old-fashioned tea-service, which having placed on the table, she was hurrying away again, now encouraged young Annesley to ask permission to visit the bedside of the poor old invalid, before the night became too far advanced to admit of disturbing him.

"Dorcas is with him night and day. He has all the attendance his state requires," was Lady Annesley's frigid reply.

"But as a satisfaction to myself, and, if I may be permitted to say so, to *him*. Poor Nicholas was always so fond of me!"—pleaded Basil.

"He is past deriving pleasure from the presence even of those who are dearest to him," persisted Lady Annesley. "Let me beg you rather to ascertain that your things have been safely deposited in your room, by the person who accompanied you; yonder poor girl is scarcely strong enough to supply the place of him we are about to lose."

Basil accepted the hint. Nothing more likely to injure the candour of an ingenuous heart, than the undue possession of a secret. For the first time in his life, he attributed a stratagem to his mother; convinced she was desirous to get rid of him, only that she might replace the mysterious portrait upon her desk in its accustomed concealment.

He was so far justified in his suspicions, that, on his return to the tea-table, refreshed after his day's journey by purification from London soot and the dust of the road, a single glance towards the ebony desk convinced him the picture had disappeared. He fancied, however, that his mother had detected even that momentary scrutiny; for her deportment was, if possible, more ungracious than before.

At any other moment, he would have attempted to dissipate her ill-humour by allusions to the news of the day, and the

tittle-tattle of London life. But though excluded from the chamber of death, he could not forget that, at the distance of a few chambers from the one they occupied, lay an aged man, endeared to both by long association, and about to appear in the presence of his Maker.

This indeed was a sufficient excuse for the singular mood of Lady Annesley. In many persons, grief takes the form of anger. A proud spirit, unwilling to display itself covered with dust and ashes, uplifts its head with unbecoming pride, in order to conceal that temporary humiliation.

As every stroke tells against a gamester in his vein of ill fortune, whatever topic was selected by Basil to dispel the embarrassment of that painful *tête-à-tête*, seemed to aggravate her still further against him.

Lady Annesley, as if desirous of promoting desultory conversation, adverted to the

young nephew of the Duke of Rochester, who had recently entered his regiment.

"I was formerly acquainted with his father, and uncle," said she, carelessly.

"His father is dead," observed Basil; "and his uncle were perhaps better in his grave. He is in the jaws of perdition,—ruined soul, body, and estate;—a victim to play, with his fine fortune melting away in the grasp of the Jews."—

At that moment, an impulse of compunction, peculiar to generous hearts, brought before him the beneficent conduct of A. O., and the consciousness of his own obligations; and without reflecting on the singular effects such an outburst must produce on Lady Annesley, who had not the slightest clue to the origin of his opinions, he suddenly veered round, and began expressing his contempt of the existing prejudices against that contemned class of the community;—citing every advantageous opinion or ex-

ample ever adduced in favour of the people after God's own heart, from Cumberland and Miss Edgeworth, back to the choicest authorities of the Judaic world.

A sudden flush overspread the habitually pallid face of Lady Annesley. Her spirit seemed chafing within her. At the last she spake with her tongue.

"I can readily understand," said she, with undisguised bitterness, "that the follies and vices of London, and the companionship into which they may have forced you, may have done something towards relaxing the principles in which you have been reared, and the proud instincts of honourable descent. But I had *not* expected you would so soon have stooped to *this!*—I had not supposed that a few thousands conceded by these wretched unbelievers, these heirs of perdition, gilded over like the molten calf till even Christian kings fall down and worship, would so soon have obliterated in your

honest heart the prejudice common to all ages, all nations, and consequently respectable even as a prejudice. For my part, I loathe a Jew!—I am proud to declare that I *loathe* a Jew!—Apart from the crime which stamped them with eternal condemnation, I detest their principles—I detest their practices. Wherever there are Jews, *there* is narrowness of mind, foulness of body, baseness of heart. They are a filthy people. Even as of old they bought with thirty pieces of silver the blood of their Redeemer, would they still chaffer for the heart's blood of the innocent! I tell you Basil, I loathe them! and those who induced you to entertain a contrary opinion, deceived *you* as much as they injured *me!*"

The eyes of young Annesley were now fixed upon his mother with unqualified amazement. She, usually so mild, so serene, so low-voiced, so indifferent to the things of this world, to be excited by so slight a

cause into this violent diatribe!—And in the house of death!—with her aged servitor expiring almost within hearing of her uncalled-for vociferation!

Basil was awe-struck! He could not help surmising for a moment, that his beloved mother's reason might be affected by her attendance on the death-bed of her faithful old domestic, while weakened by the effects of recent indisposition.

"Believe me, dearest mother," said he, "I never heard you accused of any partiality for these maligned people. My inclination in their favour is a weakness arising from peculiar circumstances of a nature wholly personal."

"You *have* heard it!"—cried Lady Annesley, unsubdued by his deprecation. "Do not add deceit to the audacity of attempting to invade the sacredness of my thoughts and feelings.—You *have* heard it!"

Terrified and grieved, young Annesley

was about to enter upon his own disculpation. But as he advanced nearer towards his mother, he perceived that, overcome by the violence of her emotions, she had thrown herself back in her chair, and covered her face with her hands to conceal a frantic burst of tears.

Basil Annesley stood transfixed. It was the first time in his life he had ever seen his mother shed a tear!—

CHAPTER V.

Oh! mother—yet no mother.—SAVAGE.

"I HAD no intention of offending you, dearest mother," whispered Basil, when at length the subsiding of Lady Annesley's emotion seemed to justify his addressing her. But, to his great surprise, on the withdrawal of her hands from her face to enable her to reply, her countenance had so completely resumed its usual rigidity, that all apology appeared superfluous. He now attempted to take into his own one of the hands which had been screening those stern features; but it was obstinately fixed to her side.

"Believe me, I had no intention of offending you!" reiterated the young man, with still more earnest affection.

"Your excuses are a deeper offence than your indiscretion," replied Lady Annesley, in a harsh voice. "Your coming hither at all, has disturbed and thwarted me. Your conduct, now you are here, seems scarcely likely to reconcile me to your disobedience."

"Dearest mother!" cried Basil, stung by her severity out of his habitual deference of reserve, "you well know that your wishes are laws to me,—that I would sacrifice my happiness here and hereafter for your sake——"

"You are a large talker, Basil!" interrupted Lady Annesley. "It is easy to protest—easy to undertake services or sacrifices that can never be required of you. I requested you to abstain for the present from visiting The Grange.—Yet, you are here!"

"I have already explained my motives," cried Basil, eagerly—"already pledged myself to immediate departure. If you wish it, mother, I will not wait till to-morrow—I will be off this very night. I can return to Lyndhurst,—I can sleep at the Inn.—It is late.—The fellow who brought my baggage will scarcely be persuaded to return for it to-night. But early in the morning he shall be here, in time to enable me to start by the first coach."

Lady Annesley gazed a moment upon the young and handsome face, on which the most earnest sincerity was at that moment painted.

"Abide here to-night, my son," said she, calmly, at the close of her scrutiny. "Another time, be more acquiescent."

"But I assure you, dearest mother, I should be well accommodated at Lyndhurst; and it may be as well to be there in waiting for the coach. I——"

"You will remain *here*, if you please!" interrupted Lady Annesley, in a cold and positive tone. "It is, as you observe, late; and the hour is unseemly for traversing the fields. The forest produces inconvenient neighbours, and dangerous company. The illness of my poor Nicholas proceeded, in the first instance, from a rough encounter on the road, one evening at dusk, on his return from conveying my letters to the post. I pray you, therefore, to remain here——"

"Certainly, if such be your desire."

"But not the less to hasten your departure at an early hour to-morrow. I will even take my leave of you to-night, Basil; for I must watch through the small hours, to enable poor Dorcas to take some sleep; and shall probably retire to rest just as you are stirring."

"As you please, dear mother," replied the dispirited young man, perceiving by

her tone and gesture that these words implied dismissal for the night. "If you must indeed watch by the poor old man, I can understand that my presence here must be importunate. But if you would only permit me, for this one night, to take your place——"

"I have already expressed my pleasure on that point."

"At least, since you judge me too restless or careless for a nurse, (though you used to praise my care when I waited upon yourself during your attack of ague last year,) at least, there is Hannah to relieve you. Hannah is a stout, active, trusty girl, who would be none the worse for wanting, occasionally, a night's rest."

"She is *not* to be trusted!—The young are ever inefficient watchers. With *them* 'the spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak.'—*They* have no distracting thoughts to keep their senses on the alert,—no cares

to render them wakeful. They lay their heads on their pillows, and are in Heaven till morning; and when they attempt the watcher's chair of penance, fancy their heads upon their pillows!"

"If it be on that account you refuse my services," observed Basil, "I promise you, mother, that I have cares enough in my keeping, both of my own and other people, to keep me as wakeful as you could desire."

Again did Lady Annesley intently examine her son.

"You have no right to have cares of your own," said she; "and I advise you to be cautious how you become care-keeper for others. Your own turn will come. You have your share, Basil, in the typical inheritance of the sons of Adam,—the thorns which the earth was condemned to bring forth in punishment for the sin of our common parents. Such is the commandment of a jealous GOD!"

"I am more in fear of the penalty entailed upon my head by the fall of man," observed Basil, in a low voice, "than of having to answer for any sins of my *own* parents. But, as I said before, mother, if it be because you think me a sleepy-head that you deny me the pleasure of relieving your guard for this one night ——"

"Once and for all, it is *not* on that account," said Lady Annesley, in an angry voice. "You were not wont, Basil, to be so pertinacious or so inquisitive. Amend the fault before we meet again; and shew me that it is already repented by immediate compliance with my requests. Retire to rest, that you may be stirring the earlier.—Yonder is your bed-candle.—Good night."

Basil Annesley was conscious at that moment of a choking sensation in his throat, such as he had often experienced in childhood, when unjustly chidden; and which

now almost suggested resistance to authority thus harshly exercised. He remained a moment doubtful whether to fling himself at Lady Annesley's feet, and implore a more motherly entreatment; or stand forth reprovingly in all the energy of his youthful sense of her injustice, and hazard a still stronger appeal.

But that momentary pause recalled to his generous mind that his mother was harassed by fatigue, and care-worn by the danger of her faithful servant; and he determined, as his filial piety had so often determined before, to submit and be patient.

After imprinting a kiss upon the slender hand which, if no longer obstinately withheld from him, was far from encouragingly held forth, he took the candle from the marble table, hastily lighted it, and silently withdrew, eager to give vent, in his own chamber, to the emotions contending in his heart.

But on his arrival there, he was struck by the order in which his things were laid out for him; and the more than usual care with which his comfort had been provided for.—Hoping to obtain an interview with old Dorcas, and entreat her influence with her lady, to obtain him his due share in the family vigils, he strove to discover some deficiency entitling him to ring for assistance.—Impossible!—Everything was in its place—everything forthcoming. The kettle was beside the fire,—the boot-jack and slippers beside the chair.—

"I can, at all events, summon Hannah, on pretence of wishing to be called before daybreak," said he, musing.

Having fulfilled his intention, he anxiously awaited the tap at the door, announcing the usually assiduous attendance of the active damsel. But no knock was heard, —no Hannah made her appearance; and when, weary of waiting, and having twice

poked up the fire into a blaze to beguile his impatience, he ventured to ring again, the same silence prevailed. Nothing was audible but the shrill whistling of the wind in the old corridor; and now and then, a squeak and scuffle among the merry mice, coursing each other in brigades, by moonlight, in the deserted chambers above.

A third time did Basil make the attempt, which, he trusted, would summon poor Dorcas for a moment from the chamber of the invalid which lay at the extremity of an adjoining passage. But, lo! when, instead of the expected tap, the door revolved slowly upon its hinges, it was his mother, and not her attendant, who stood before him!—

"Are you in want of anything, that you thus disturb the house?"—said she, gravely. "I thought I had been careful in supplying all you could possibly need to-night."

"I merely rang for Hannah, to say that——"

"Hannah has retired to bed, and Dorcas is retiring," persisted Lady Annesley. "When you released me just now, I took up my post for the night beside the sick man; satisfied that, having carefully arranged your room with my own hands previous to joining you at tea, no further attendance would be wanting. Is there anything I can procure or do for you?"—

"Could I have entertained the least idea, dearest mother, that you had already given yourself all this trouble on my account——"

"I ask you again, is there anything further I can do for you?—Be quick!—My presence is required elsewhere."—

"Nothing on earth!"

"You rang, then, to summon the girl for a needless attendance?"

"I rang to request I might be called at

the earliest hour of morning, to secure my obedience to your orders," replied Basil, proudly.

"Did you suppose that I should leave the hour of your rising to chance? Be satisfied!—You shall be called betimes. And now let me entreat you to abstain from further disturbance. You are in the house of sickness—perhaps to become, before morning, the house of death!"—

Basil stood confounded at the unmerited harshness of his mother; and did not recover his self-possession for many minutes after Lady Annesley quitted the room. His heart was now sorer than before. He was more than ever stung by her severity, on finding it coupled with the vigilance of mother-love which had presided over the arrangements of his chamber. He felt that he must indeed be a grievous offender, since the affections of her heart were thus controllable by the sternness of her displeasure.

He now flung himself despondingly, into a seat before the fire; and placing his feet upon the old-fashioned fender, and fixing his eyes upon the heavy brass dogs supporting the crackling logs—upon the hearth, tried to feel himself at home. It is strange how often the habitation familiar to us from infancy, seems less familiar and less a home to us than the dwelling of the stranger. For the life and soul of him, Basil could *not* feel at home. He kept dreading the re-entrance of his mother for further reprehension, yet equally feared to bolt the door against her return, lest she should take offence at this seeming defiance. His very thoughts, under the influence of such impressions, did not seem secure from her intrusion. There were subjects on which he felt afraid to ponder. There were people he dared not pass in review or recal with the tenderness of memory, lest he should suddenly find the severe eye of Lady An-

nesley fixed upon his face, prepared to scan and scrutinize the nature of his feelings.

Most people are conscious of the sort of disburthenment of thought and sentiment apt to follow a transition from cities to the country. In the quiet of the first night spent out of town, disjointed images reconnect themselves; ideas and conclusions assume a regular train of thought; and Basil experienced all the desire of one suddenly enfranchised from the rabble and tumult of London, to dwell upon the course of recent events, and determine more consideringly what portion of his loves and friendships had been lavished in vain.

But it was no moment for such reveries. The dread of his mother's reappearance was potent over his mind, as over that of a child the terror of a midnight apparition.—His thoughts were paralysed.—He could not even feel freely at that moment.—

Wondering surmises hastily traversed his

brain with regard to the mysterious portrait he had seen that evening, and the still more mysterious emotions betrayed by his mother. Painfully pleasing visions flitted before his eyes of the bright form of Esther—his own Esther—his beloved Esther! But just as her eyes seemed gazing into his, the creaking of the wainscot seemed to indicate, from without, the approach of Lady Annesley; and the light of the fire appeared a reflection of that which had recently brightened the chamber, from the taper held in the hand of his mother.

The night was beginning to be tempestuous. As the moon set, the winds were rising; beating menacingly against the crazy walls of the old Grange, as if to demand how they had dared so long to withstand the attacks of time and tide; and roaring in the vast chimney, as though to inquire the meaning of an unwonted inmate in that room.

By degrees, the storm rose into fierceness. The shrill whistling of the winds became a shriek; and arrowy patterings of sleet were heard sharply against the windows.

Under this influence, the spirits of Basil became more and more depressed. He was incapable of even the sensations of comfort imparted by a warm fireside, when listening to a storm without. He was an intruder in his mother's house—he was an alien from his mother's heart. Lady Annesley had secrets in which she rejected his participation—she had cares for which she disdained his solace. At that moment, Basil felt himself to be most unhappy.

To sit and gaze upon the glowing embers, however, afforded little consolation. It is when perplexed, not when afflicted, that we delight in fire-gazing. At length, the warmth which imparted no pleasure, seemed to inspire energy: for, suddenly starting up, he recalled to mind that the surest way

to win his mother's confidence, was implicit obedience; and that, in order "early to rise," it was expedient to adopt the precept of "early to bed."

Midnight had already struck, previous to this good resolution; and ere his head had been long upon the pillow, the first hour of morning was sternly announced by the crazy old clock gracing the stair-head adjoining his chamber. It was unlikely, however, that he should hear the striking of a second, for he was growing drowsy. His cares assumed a less definite pressure; and the shape of Esther hovered less visibly before his closing eyes. Easier in spirit—easy in position, he forgot the causes of maternal oppression and his own subservience to a Jew, and fell quietly asleep.

His dreams, however, soon became unquiet. The expressive countenance portrayed by the miniature, (its handsome features commingled with those of Abednego

Osalez,) seemed to mock and perplex his slumbers. Again, did his stern mother harshly reproach him; and strange voices seemed to mingle in mockery with her upbraidings.

He woke—he started from his feverish pillow! The strange voices were easily explained by the fitful moaning of the storm, which now appeared to sink into the sobbing of despair,—now to rise into shrieks of eldritch laughter. But there were no faces around him to explain the visions of his disquiet. He was alone, with scarcely a gleam of light emanating from the dying embers on the hearth.

In another moment, he would have sunk down again upon his pillow, and fallen once more asleep, but that his disturbed imagination conceived an idea that the wailing which at first appeared that of the storm without, might, after all, be the expression of human suffering,—the plaintive cries of

the dying man!—His mother might be exposed to the dreadful task of watching alone over an agonized bed of death!—

He rose, and flung on his dressing-gown. Displeased as Lady Annesley might be at his presuming to disobey her commands, he would not suffer this. He *could* not forbear!—He would insist upon sharing her vigils. Softly opening the door, he proceeded, without a light, along the corridor, hoping to attain the door of the apartment, which he knew to have been appropriated to the poor old man. But, as he advanced, he became again persuaded that those mournful moanings really proceeded from the gusts of the storm. Nay, as he approached nearer the chamber of sickness, these happened to have fallen into such momentary stillness, that the beating of his own heart seemed almost as audible, as he recognised, in the dead of the night, the stern voice of Lady Annesley reciting aloud the prayers for the

sick and grievously afflicted, beside the bed of the dying man.

Retreating in haste to his chamber, as if unworthy to share a task so solemn, Basil was soon in bed; and the momentary chill and movement of his exploit seemed to have restored the power of slumber; for he now slept heavily, and slept long.—*How* long, he knew not: but a pale grey light was stealing into the chamber, when again he opened his eyes.

And *this* time, he could not deceive himself. A face *was* bending over him, and peering into *his*. Not, however, the ideal face of Esther. There was no mistaking it for any one of the visages which had haunted his dreams; or even for the rosy face of the damsel who, Lady Annesley had informed him, was charged to rouse him at daybreak. It was an aged face, withered by time and sorrow—that of his mother's ancient gentlewoman.

" Master Basil, I say,—*dear* Master Basil," gasped the intruder, " I have been calling you these five minutes."—

" Thanks, Dorcas, many thanks.—I fear I have been sleeping heavily.—Send me my shaving-water, and I will be up directly. Is it late,—or am I in time?"—

" Hush, Sir;—speak softly, I beg of you. My lady has not been an hour in bed; and having forced her to take an anodyne draught after the dreadful night she has been passing to ensure her a few hours' rest to meet her further trials, I am grievously afraid of having her waked.—Nothing more injurious, Master Basil, than being disturbed when opiates are taking effect; and my poor lady is in no state to bear further extremities. She has not slept till now, these five nights past; nor enjoyed undisturbed slumber from the beginning of the poor old gardener's illness."

" I will be very careful, Dorcas. It had

been already settled between us, that she was not to be disturbed for my departure. I will dress immediately, and shall have left the house without her knowing it."

"It is not *that*, Sir.—I do not *wish* you to go, Master Basil.—I want your help, Sir; I am in great trouble,—sore trouble and distress!"—faltered the old waiting-woman, drawing her hand across her eyes.

"I am inclined to thank GOD for your being here, Sir;—and yet I fear my lady will never forgive me for having even mentioned the subject to you.—But indeed, and indeed, Sir, such scenes are too much for her! It would go against my conscience,—nay, I believe it is as much as her life is worth —to wake her at this moment. Yet indeed, Sir, I cannot manage him alone."

"Are you in need, then, of my assistance for Nicholas, Dorcas?" cried young Annesley. "I will be with you in a moment——"

"But you are not aware, Sir;—I must first

apprise you—Your kind, good heart, Master Basil, would be too much shocked——"

"My dear Dorcas, it is not the first time I have seen a dying man. Even my professional duties sometimes lead me to an hospital."

"Ay, ay, Sir! But not to a death-bed like this. It is a hard thing even for *me*, who have passed through enough and to spare of the sorry sights of this world, to see my poor old fellow-servant in such a condition.—But for *your* young eyes, Master Basil——"

"Only give me a moment to throw on my clothes——"

"I am not without hope, Sir, that, startled by your coming, whom he has not seen for months, Nicholas may so far recover his reason as to know you; and then, perhaps, he might compose himself, and be quieted without recourse to violent means——"

"To *violent* means?" interrupted Basil. "Is the poor fellow, then, bereft of his reason?"

"He has had repeated attacks of delirium throughout his illness. Yesterday morning, the professional gentleman who comes from Southampton to visit him, found it necessary to place him under restraint. Towards evening, he became calmer; and my lady insisted upon releasing him from the strait-waistcoat. Infirm as he is—feeble—dying—she says his violence is merely that of words, and that he can do no serious injury to himself or others."

"Gracious Heaven! My mother has been exposed, then, alone, throughout the night, to the violence of a lunatic!"

"Nicholas was never known, even in his worst paroxysms, Master Basil, to lift his hand, or even his voice, against my lady. Her presence seems to have a soothing power over him, beyond the authority or coercion of the physicians."

"But why, Dorcas, did you not tell me all this last night?"

"I was sent to bed by my lady, Sir, tired and exhausted with struggling against him, without so much as an intimation of your arrival; and I am convinced, that, after so anxiously keeping you away from the Grange lest you should witness this mournful scene, my lady was in hopes you would be off to London without obtaining any suspicion of the matter."

"How strange!" faltered young Annesley.

"My lady loves you too well, Master Basil, to bear your being unnecessarily troubled."

"But herself, Dorcas?"

"My lady is *used* to trouble——"

"My dear, dear mother!"—

"Shew your affection, Sir, by lending me your assistance, and securing her a few hours' sleep: she will wake refreshed and comforted. But unless I can prevail upon

you to remain, I have not courage to undertake him alone, till the Doctor comes."

Having persuaded the ancient gentlewoman to facilitate her own object by leaving him to dress and rejoin her, Basil hastily and anxiously accomplished his toilet. He was soon at the door from which he had so timidly retreated in the dead of night.

On entering the chamber, he perceived Dorcas stationed on one side the bed; and, hidden within the curtains on the other, weeping and trembling, the stout servant girl, who had been left in charge of the maniac during her companion's absence. The grey light of dawn dimly penetrated the scene; falling chiefly on the white head of the venerable sufferer, who was propped with pillows, and staring around him with the ghastly fixedness characteristic of aberration of intellect.

"Do not be afraid of approaching him, Sir: he is quite harmless!" said Dorcas,

with the bluntness of a coarse mind, on seeing her young master hesitate beside the door, impressed by the patriarchal aspect of the old man, whose hoary beard had been many weeks unshorn. "Besides, as I said just now, the surprise might do him good."

"My poor Nicholas!" faltered young Annesley, who had by this time reached the bed.

"Who called me?" demanded the patient, in a hollow voice.

"I am sorry to hear you have been so ill, Nicholas," persisted Basil, avoiding a direct reply, with a view to determine his power of recognition.

Instead of answering, the old man fixed his glassy eyes upon the person who thus unexpectedly presented himself; and for some moments did not vary the dull steadfastness of his gaze. At length, a gradual ray of intelligence seemed to brighten that soulless stare.

"I know you *now!*" said he, in a low voice. "I know you, and I tell you to begone!—What are you doing here?—Must there be more blood upon your hand?—Has not my lord expressly bidden us spurn you from his gate?—But there needed no bidding of *his*:—I would have done it untold!—Even *I* would not witness the shame of my young lady!"

"My poor Nicholas, compose yourself!" said Basil, in a soothing voice, bending kindly towards him.

"Your *poor* Nicholas!" shouted the maniac, at the top of his broken voice, causing young Annesley to start back.—"How *dare* you call me your poor Nicholas?—How *dare* you attempt to cajole me?—Away with you!—away, Jew!—I *know* you, I tell you. When first your gold persuaded me unsuspectingly to do your bidding, I thought you a gentleman,—I thought you a *man!*—and now I spit upon you as a false and unbe-

lieving Jew! Away, away, I say, or there is strength enough still in the old man's gripe to tear you limb from limb!"

"For God's sake, Mr. Annesley, Sir, get away from him!" screamed the girl, who, in the danger of another, lost sight of her own. "He will be the death of you, Sir!"—

"He shall not go!—I have him fast!" cried the maniac, grasping the arm of the unresisting young man.

"Indeed, Master Basil, it will be safer to leave the room," cried Dorcas, becoming terrified in her turn.

"*Basil!—what Basil?*—ay, ay, another of *her* tricks! She wants to impose him upon my lord as his grandson—but she cannot deceive *me!* I am not yet so old, or so blind, as not to discover him through all his disguises; and from the moment he attempted to take the life of my master's son, I swore his own should not be safe if he came hither again.—And now I have

caught you!—as usual—as usual, as of old, stealing into the house like a thief in the dark, when others are asleep—others suffering and weeping—ay, weeping tears of blood—for the sorrows you have caused!—My poor young lady!"

Basil Annesley was now becoming really intimidated; not by the sense of his own danger, but by the dread of obtaining surreptitious insight into the secrets of his mother. The word "Jew,"—the allusion to blood,—to family sorrow,—to family disgrace,—caused his own to thrill within his veins.

"Be calm, my poor old friend," faltered he, in an altered voice, without attempting to disengage his arm from the grasp of the lunatic. "Look at me, Nicholas!—Recal me to your mind!—Remember little Basil—remember Basil Annesley!"—A sort of howl instantly burst from the infuriated patient,—a howl terminating in a burst of frenetic laughter.

"ANNESLEY, forsooth!"—cried he. "Poor fool, poor fool!—poor cover to shame,—poor blind, blind dupe!—Annesley?—the victim of a cunning, paltry Jew! If your name be Annesley, again I say, away with ye!—Go hide yourself in the grave, as your father did before you! He swore he would!—He said nothing but death could efface such dishonour;—a violent death—a bloody death. But the drops he shed in obtaining it, young man, wrought not half the anguish in the heart they burst from, that the tears of his repentant widow have wrung out of the depths of her own. Away with ye, I say again, and hide yourself,—child of the foulest father and guiltiest mother that ever called down upon the head of their offspring the judgments of GOD."

Basil Annesley shuddered as he listened. The trembling fingers of the delirious sufferer still griped his arm. But it was not their feverish hold which caused his heart

to quail.—A heavy hand was upon his shoulder: his mother stood beside him!—

Disturbed from her slumbers by the dreadful cry uttered by her distracted charge, Lady Annesley had risen in haste, and hurried, in her night-dress, to his chamber.

She arrived there just in time to overhear the terrible revelations which had driven every tinge of colour from the cheeks of her son!

CHAPTER VI.

Youth at the prow, and Pleasure at the helm,
Regardless of the sweeping whirlwinds sway,
Which, hushed in grim repose, expects its evening prey.
GRAY.

FEW sunnier or pleasanter mansions in the metropolis, than the one in Arlington Street, inhabited by the Maitland family; overlooking the Green Park, across a trimly little garden belted with lilac bushes and evergreens; but containing within, a scene of brighter seeming than the gayest London thoroughfare can supply.

It is impossible to conceive a stronger contrast than between the stern retreat of Sir Bernard

Annesley's widow, and the brilliant abode of Lord Maitland's wife:—the one grim and gloomy as her own care-crazed destinies;—the other, radiant with gilding and varnish—porcelain and or-molu,—musical instruments, and fashionable caricatures;—everything that modern luxury can supply to dazzle the eyes of Time with their senseless glitter.

The Maitlands were, in most respects, showy people,—heartless people,—people of the day,—such as might be expected in a family where the father is on the turf, and the only duties of the mother's life not discharged by proxy, are those of a patroness of Almack's.

Lady Maitland's daughters were the production of the governess;—Lord Maitland's son, the work of Eton and Sandhurst;—and, considering the superficial second nature derivable from such sources, the young people were amiable enough. They did no harm in the world. It was not their own fault that they had never been taught to do good. Their town residence was one of those pleasant houses

which constitute a charming lounge for London idlers; for chat, scandal, and music were always waiting till called for at the Maitland's.

Before her daughters grew up, her ladyship had adopted the system of encouraging morning visitors to assist her in frittering away her leisure;—and there appeared no pretext for suddenly opposing an obstacle to the tide of busy idleness she had brought upon herself. It was impossible to say frankly—"I no longer desire young men to frequent my house, because my daughters are now young women; and that if they see Laura and Lucy too familiarly, they may not be tempted to make them their wives." The thing was, therefore, suffered to go on.

Besides, the spoiled child of the family, John Maitland, the eldest son, was too devoid of rational pursuits to dispense with constant society. John hated to be alone with his parents. John was in the Guards—a fixture in London; and would have made himself a considerable nuisance to the family with whom

he hated to be left alone, unless his pleasure had been duly studied.

His brother officers had, consequently, the run of the sunny drawing-room in Arlington Street. As the Dowager-Colonel, old Carrington, often observed, "There would have been no getting through the winter in town, without the Maitlands!"—a comprehensive popularity fatal to young ladies on their preferment. It is not often marriages take place in a family, where the daughters are only generalized as "*the* So-and-Sos."

"What the deuce has become of Annesley?" demanded John Maitland of Captain Blencowe, who was sitting with them in Arlington Street the day after Basil's departure for Barlingham Grange.

"Out of town!"—was the careless reply.

"I fancied that most of the holiday parties were broken up?"—observed Laura Maitland, whose notion of country attraction consisted in a gay mansion, where thirty people sit down

daily to dinner; in a hunting county, with meets on the lawn,—or with billiards and private theatricals where the sporting is indifferent.

"Annesley is not gone to join a *party*. Annesley goes into the country to be privately flogged with his mother's apron-string!" replied Captain Blencowe, jocosely.

"To be *tied to* it, I suppose you mean!"—observed John Maitland, who was sealing notes at a writing-table, where his mother had been dictating invitations.

"I don't think she likes him well enough to secure his company by coercive means," retorted Blencowe. "I never saw so cold or harsh a woman as Lady Annesley."

"But where does one meet her, Captain Blencowe?" inquired Lucy Maitland, from the embroidery frame at which she sat listening.

"Lady Maitland may, perhaps, have met her five-and-twenty years ago. In *our* time she has lived the life of a recluse."

"Then how came *you* to see her?"

"I did *not* come. On the contrary, she came to see *me*. When Basil had that attack of fever last year, and was so near dying, I wrote to Lady Annesley, who hurried up to town. I was officiating as his nurse, and vow to Heaven that the sight of her severe countenance and mourning dress, from morning till night, made me almost as ill as himself. After sitting up with her half a night, I fancied I had been in the company of one of the familiars of the Inquisition!"

By Jove, Blencowe, how you do romance!" cried John Maitland. "To conjure an ugly old woman, in a black bombazeen gown, into a familiar of the Inquisition!"

"How could I tell into what she might conjure *me?* She had all the air of a practitioner of the black art! However, with all Lady Annesley's apparent harshness, if she be half so good a mother as nurse, Basil can have no fault to find with her."

"But *does* he find fault?" inquired Lucy Maitland, with interest.

"Basil seldom finds fault with anything or anybody, for he is the best-natured fellow in the world. But I suspect that he would sooner arraign the Commander-in-Chief, or the Commander-in-Chief's Commander-in-*Chiefissimo*, than allude slightingly to his mother. Annesley is almost superstitious in his filial devotion."

John Maitland looked round from the writing-table with a significant gesture towards Blencowe, as if to implore silence on so delicate a topic in presence of his own mother; while Lucy murmured something over her *crochet* work that sounded very like commendation.

"I am sadly afraid young Annesley is likely to make a fool of himself," sententiously interposed Colonel Carrington, who was in the habit of establishing himself, his half hour *per diem*, in Lady Maitland's drawing-room, as much as a matter of routine as he

swallowed his morning dose of Gregory's gout mixture, or his evening digestion-pill, fancying that, because the boys of the regiment were amused there, he must be amused there also; for it had become a matter of course for every ensign, on entering the regiment, to fall in love with one or other of John Maitland's sisters; and, if of sufficient fortune or connexions, to be admitted as a lounger in Arlington-street — the daughters favouring them as agreeable partners, or the mother as eligible partners for life.

If the Dowager-Colonel formed the same pretensions as his younger and more acceptable brother officers, he was admitted with very different views. Old Carrington, the butt of the subalterns at mess, was also the butt of the Maitlands' drawing-room; nor did they seem aware how many people accept it as a sure indication of the ill-nature and ill-breeding of a society to *have* an established butt as a stimulant to its attempts at wit.

One of the many ways in which the old beau lent himself to the fulfilment of their purposes, was by his jealousy of every good-looking young fellow who joined the regiment. Till Wilberton came, Annesley had been the object of his antipathy; and Colonel Carrington still rarely neglected an opportunity of attacking Basil.

On the present occasion, finding that no notice was taken of the first discharge of his battery, he hazarded a second fire.

"I am afraid," said he, more articulately, "young Annesley is likely to make a fool of himself, which I sincerely regret. Let Lady Annesley be as disagreeable as she may, Basil is an only son, and the son of a gallant soldier. I should be sorry, indeed, to see his mother's old age rendered miserable by his ruin."

"In what does Basil make himself a greater fool than the rest of us?" demanded John Maitland, (Captain Blencowe being too much engrossed by Lucy's work-basket to take up

the cudgels in defence of his absent friend.) "We are all tolerable asses, one way or other. For my part, I look upon Basil Annesley as the Solon of the battalion."

"Then give me leave to observe, that you say very little for the rest of us!" said the Colonel, crabbedly, settling his long throat in an old-fashioned stock.

"Pretty nearly as much as you deserve," gracelessly retorted young Maitland. "For instance, he does not ruin himself in perfumes and cosmetics, like Loftus, for the cultivation of whiskers that will not grow, and the dispersion of freckles that *will;* or like Wilberton, in building cabs and Broughams for the pleasure of seeing those eternal crests and ciphers of his, emblazoned in some new fashion. He does not set Graham's in an uproar, night after night, by his bad play, like Blencowe yonder, who is whispering so low to Lucy that I conclude that neither of them hear what we are saying."—

"Did you speak to *me?*" inquired Captain Blencowe, consciously, suddenly starting up.

"Nor does he, like you, my dear Colonel," persisted John Maitland, "amuse the figurantes at rehearsal, by the stiff-jointed deliberation with which he stalks out of the way when they are clearing the stage for action."

Colonel Carrington was, just then, troubled with so severe a fit of coughing, that he heard not a syllable of this rude attack.

"You seem to have got your winter cough again, Colonel Carrington?"—said Laura Maitland, with pretended solicitude;—"you should try some Arabic lozenges."

"Nonsense — lozenges!" interrupted her brother; "Carrington's cough proceeds from asthma. It is a very serious thing to trifle with a chronic asthma!"

"I have told you a hundred times, Maitland, that it is nothing of the sort!" pettishly interrupted the Dowager-Colonel; "Cannot a man take cold without having an habitual

asthma?—*You* are, in fact, the cause of my catarrh, by throwing up the window at the Club, with an east wind blowing in our faces, to shout to Harman in his cab about the issue of the pigeon-match. It would not have hurt him to get out, or *you* to *go* out, rather than run the chance of giving cold to twenty of your friends."

"And aggravating the habitual asthma of the twenty-first!—Well, well, my dear Colonel, I'm sorry I mentioned it. I know it is a delicate point; and the men know it is a delicate point, particularly on field-days, and in a high wind. However, many poor fellows in the prime of life are subject to gout and asthma.—Many besides yourself suffer from gout and asthma before they are fifty:—don't they, mother?"

"Have you finished sealing those notes, John?" demanded Lady Maitland, by way of motherly interference.

"All those that signify! All the elder sons

and young baronets of decent estate have been despatched. I left the younger brothers and Irish dowagers to the last, in case the seal should get too warm, and myself too *luke*warm, to escape the charge of slovenliness. We shall still do very well, however, for a 'Lady Maitland requests the honour of Lord George Rawdon's company to a small early party on Friday next:' for if Rawdon were not a Lord George, I suppose we might give him a wafer at once."

"What was that you were saying about gout and asthma, Colonel Carrington?" demanded Lady Maitland, conceiving in her turn, that it might be as well to change the conversation.

"I was saying," interposed the Colonel—choosing, for his own sake, to misunderstand her—"that it is a lamentable thing young Annesley should be making such a fool of himself."

"That is the third time you have repeated yourself, Carr, my fine fellow!" said young

Maitland, completing the sealing of the last note; "and I see you are *determined* we should ask questions. You sha'nt be kept in suspense any longer. How is Annesley likely to make a fool of himself—*when*—*where?*—Make haste!—Say your worst, and put him and *us* out of our pain."

"I don't understand you, Maitland," said the Colonel, again settling his head uneasily in his stock. "I know no more than yourself of his proceedings. The rehearsals I attend—*you* attend also;—and for once that *I* set foot in Graham's, you are there twenty times!"

"But is there anything that commits Mr. Annesley more than the rest of the world, in frequenting either of those places?" inquired Lucy Maitland, addressing her question directly to Captain Blencowe, as much as to say, —"If you love me, take the part of your friend!" which, *if* he loved her, he was the less likely to do.

"I trust not—being therein as great a delinquent as himself," rejoined Blencowe. "But those who want to hear Annesley abused, need only listen to Wilberton and Carrington—one of whom is jealous of him, and the other envious."

"Which of them is envious?" inquired Lucy Maitland, looking archly up from her work.

"The man with the least mind of the two; Envy being meaner than Jealousy."

Miss Maitland shrugged her shoulders, as if to imply the slightness of mental distinction between the young Ensign and old Colonel.

"Wilberton is envious of Basil," resumed Captain Blencowe; "because he is luckier at tennis than himself. Carrington is jealous of him; because——. But you turn away, Miss Maitland! Have you no curiosity to learn why Carrington is jealous of him?"—

"None in the world!"

"Nor even any to ascertain what Carrington is evidently dying to tell," added Captain

Blencowe, "concerning poor Annesley's modes and method of playing the fool?"—

"Still less!—I have great faith in the judgment of a man so much older than myself as Colonel Carrington," replied Lucy, trying to command emotions of either anger or sympathy; "but it would require far *more* to persuade me that a person so universally liked in the world, and loved in the regiment, whom we see almost daily, and always in so reasonable a mood and with such gentlemanly habits and feelings—is disgracing himself."

"My dear Lucy, you are very severe! You forget to whom you are speaking," observed her brother, with mock gravity.

"I am speaking to three or four of the intimate friends of Mr. Annesley," persisted the young lady, blushing deeply.

"We flatter ourselves, that, however grand that title may appear to *you*, we have higher qualifications," retorted John Maitland. "We flatter ourselves, (at least so the peerage en-

titles us,) that we are 'ALL honourable men.' We flatter ourselves, that we *all* 'play the fool,' as Carrington calls it, if not to our heart's content, to the content of our enemies—viz., to the heart's content of our intimate friends. You are consequently personal, Miss Lucy Maitland, *shamefully* personal, when you talk about Annesley's '*disgracing* himself, because his friend yonder says he is playing the fool. Understand for the future, my dear little sister, that nobody disgraces himself now-a-days, whose name does not appear in the Saturday Gazette or the Sunday newspapers."

"Then Basil Annesley is safe, I suppose," said the old Colonel, spitefully, giving his head *this* time a shake in his stock, as violent as though he were trying the strength of the vertebræ—"for he is too insignificant, in point of fortune and family, to achieve either of these evils."

"I was sure you would claim exemption for him, Carr, on some *friendly* grounds or other!"

cried John Maitland, laughing outright. "But take courage! Insignificant as we all are, no one knows at what honours we may arrive. The least people, as well as the greatest, pretend now-a-days to the distinction of bankruptcy. The fellow who supplies cigars to the door steps of the club, was threatening the other day to betake himself to Basinghall-street, if we did not square accounts with him; and I never feel certain, any Saturday night of the year, of not seeing the name of 'THOMAS JOHN MAITLAND, LORD MAITLAND, horse-dealer,' figuring in the list of private defaulters, which would be a bore, you know, on opera night!"

"Lord Maitland would not be the first *peer* of the realm who has a*ppeared* in the Gazette," observed Blencowe, accepting his friend's arguments as a joke, by an attempt at rejoinder; seeing that, in a mansion so splendidly furnished, having three servants in gay liveries waiting in the hall, and a butler on the stairs, it was impossible to treat it as earnest.

It is true he had heard it rumoured, that two of these domestics were bailiffs, in family liveries, exercising their guardianship in behalf of John Doe and Richard Roe, over the family plate. But the same scandal was astir of one or two other noble houses of his acquaintance, where he knew it to be groundless; and of all the "truths stranger than fiction" of fashionable life, few appear less credible to novices, than the facility of keeping up appearances, with a rent roll of twenty thousand a-year, on which twenty-*five* thousand a-year is owing.

It seemed impossible even to Blencowe—even to the old Colonel of so many years London experience,—that there could be any want of money in a house where the dinners were so excellent, the establishment so brilliant. Lady Maitland had her diamonds and her opera-box,—the girls their saddle-horses and French maids. The rooms in Arlington Street were bright with exotics,—the evening

parties frequent,—the morning luncheons luxurious. No finer grapes or pine apples were eaten, no older sherry drunk in London, than were to be found every day at three o'clock, at the service of the lounging associates of young Maitland.

Whatever was newest and prettiest in fashionable attire, was first worn by Lady Maitland and her daughters. Whatever appeared that was attractive, in the way of books, music, work, gaudy annuals or fashionable engravings, was to be found on their table. They ordered everything without regard to expense,—as is usually the case with persons who order on credit. They denied themselves nothing. Such good-natured people as the Maitlands have seldom courage to be niggardly in the care of their own comforts. No wonder, therefore, that they had troops of friends and hosts of pleasant acquaintances:

"For men, like butterflies,
Show not their mealy wings but to the summer;

and in a house where all was so decidedly summerish, the butterflies *called* men naturally abound.

On entering the doors in Arlington Street, when open for parties, they were saluted with the sound of music, the sparkling of lights, the blandishments of youth and beauty. Luxury was enthroned there in all her effulgence of bravery, a very Circe in her fatal charming!

Nevertheless, had the dull old Colonel or smart young Captain been clearer of observation, they must have noticed, that, at the incautious sally of her son, the brows of Lady Maitland suddenly contracted; and might have chanced to remember the adage, that "many a true word is said in jest." They saw nothing, however, but the accustomed cheerfulness of the room and mirthfulness of its inmates; for, having dined with the Maitlands the preceding day,—admired the splendour of the family plate, and the number of racing-cups on the buffet, they had compli-

mented Lord Maitland too sincerely on the excellence of his hock and claret, to treat otherwise than as an exquisite jest, the idea of his appearing in the Gazette.

"What a cursedly stupid invention, mother, is this new taper-stand!" added John Maitland, after burning his fingers in attempting to put out the light with an extinguisher of silver filigree. "You really ought to obtain a premium from Baldock, Fogg, and Emanuel, for trying to bring their stupid novelties into fashion."

"Considering that it was *you*, John, who broke the stand of old Sèvres, which that one in your hand was bought to replace," said Lady Maitland,—("a bijou, a positive bijou, —which cost fourteen guineas,—whereas the taper in your hand was only five!) the less you say on the subject the better!"

"Don't be in a rage, my dear good mother!" remonstrated the graceless guardsman. "Con-

sider for a moment your obligation to me, for affording you a pretext for the purchase of a new bauble, the fifty-second, I rather think, in the course of the year! You are the Providence of the rococo shops!—You know very well that Emanuel would send here to inquire after your health, were two days to pass without your carriage having stopped at his door!"

"I wish you would not talk such nonsense!" said Lady Maitland, really angry. "It is by these kind of assertions you persuade your father into a belief of my extravagance; when, if the truth were told, I might have purchased a service of old Sèvres, and dozens of filigree stands with the sum which——"

"Well, well!—we are all silly enough in our way, it seems, as well as Basil Annesley," interrupted young Maitland, more delicate about the betrayal of his own weaknesses, than in discussing those of other people. "I don't

pretend not to be extravagant. Like Othello's handkerchief—'I had it from my mother.'"

"You deserve to have a severe scolding from your mother, John," said his elder sister, (rising from the table, where she was emblazoning with cobalt, vermillion, and gold, escutcheons for an heraldic illustration of the baronial houses of England, to grace a costly album,) fancying it was her brother's allusions which, at that moment, drove Lady Maitland from the room; nor was it till, ten minutes afterwards, her ladyship made her re-appearance with a portion of the broken inkstand, to exhibit to Colonel Carrington the exquisite beauty of one of its groups of *bergères galantes*, that Laura discerned her mistake.

But Lady Maitland was mistaken also. Instead of obtaining sympathy from the old beau, she found him chin-deep in further scandal respecting Basil Annesley.

"I admit that Verelst is a clever artist," he was observing as she entered. "But the

passion for *virtu* is not strong enough, at Annesley's age, to account for his devoting hour after hour to the family of an obscure Jew."

"I don't believe Verelst to be a Jew," said Blencowe, coldly.

"His wife, at least, is a Jewess," said Carrington; "and so, doubtless, are his daughters. The girl for whom Annesley obtained admission into the choruses at the Opera was called Esther, and her sister's name is Salome."

"The great Newton's name, was Isaac,—but I never heard that he was a Jew.—What's in a name?—A rose, (or Esther,) by any other name would smell as sweet,"—cried John Maitland. "Faugh! give me an ounce of civet!—Who would fancy we were talking of filthy Jews!"—

At that moment, Lady Maitland insisted upon exhibiting her fragment of Sèvres, which excited little interest with the Dowager-Colonel, who was preparing a new assault.

"Annesley's *protégé* did not have much success, I fancy?"—said he, addressing young Maitland.

"As if you were not perfectly aware, my dear fellow, that she had not even the opportunity for failure!—The poor girl was so terrified by the impudence of a set of old fellows—yourself, I fancy, among the rest—amateurs, as they call themselves, who used to stare her out of countenance at rehearsal, that, on the eve of her appearance in Otello, she was seized with a fever from mere affright; and was far nearer giving up the ghost than assisting in softening (in A minor) the hard heart of Signor Brabantio!"

"I recollect now!—a foot-light panic, as the theatrical people call it," said the old Colonel, with another nervous twist of the neck within his stock.

"No such thing!—Esther Verelst had not so much as a *glimpse* of the footlights!" cried Blencowe, interfering. "She never even at-

tended a dress rehearsal.—Nay, so far from Annesley having recommended her to the managers as you suppose, or assert, I never saw a man more shocked than he was on recognising her in her shabby old brown pelisse among the chorus-singers. The poor girl, (who had been singing last year at the Ancient Concerts, and knew the importance to her family of doubling her salary,) had obtained an engagement unknown to any one;—very little surmising the difference between an Ancient Concert singer, and a chorus girl of the King's Theatre, at half-a-guinea a-week?"

"Poor Esther!—she was far too good for a chorus girl!" said John Maitland, with good-natured interest;—"too good a singer, and too good a girl——"

"She soon, however, found out her mistake: and it was *then* that Annesley protected her, and tried to get her engagement broken. Esther was too efficient a performer, however,

to be readily dispensed with: and, I believe, nothing short of the utter incapacity produced by her dangerous illness, would have softened in her favour that nether mill-stone, a managerial heart."

"And what has become of this poor girl?" demanded the elder Miss Maitland,—Lucy being too much interested in the question, to adventure the inquiry.

"*That* you had better inquire of Annesley on his return to town," said the old beau; "for he never leaves her father's house."

"And who is her father?"—persisted Laura Maitland.

"A foreign artist, whom Annesley picked up, when a boy, at some foreign university—Jena, or Göttingen,—or wherever he was brought up."

"Verelst was Basil Annesley's drawing-master, when a student at Heidelberg," said Blencowe, firmly; "and, like half the artists of half the countries in Europe, is a man of

moderate means. He got into some political scrape at Heidelberg, and fled to this country:—so he says at least. But all foreign refugees in England talk of political scrapes, as more popular here than any other. In England, he knew only Annesley, and another chap or two to whom he had given lessons at Heidelberg: but Basil appears to be the only one of them who profited by his lessons, or chose to recollect his old master:—and the first thing we heard of Verelst, was a raffle proposed at the Club for one of his pictures—(won, by the way, by Carrington,)—and a beautiful thing it was."

"Yes!—I have been offered three times the upset price of that picture, by several engravers," said the Colonel, with an air of complacency; "but I never chose to part with it."

"As Verelst and his family are starving, you might, at least, have obtained him an order for a copy," observed John Maitland.

"In order that my own might never after-

wards be considered an original!"—said the Colonel, gravely.

"And what then?—You would have put a hundred guineas in the poor fellow's pocket, without taking *one* out of your own,—which you know, Carr, you would as soon part with, as with your life's blood!"

"On the contrary," retorted the Colonel—"I bought, last summer, a set of sporting sketches of Verelst, which had been previously offered to yourself, and rejected."

"Ay!—because you got them at half-price; whereas *I* had the decency to reject them, because, not having the money to pay for them, I thought I should be an ugly customer for a poor fellow like Verelst."

"Quite right!" interposed Lucy.

"But why did you never mention this artist, or his works, to *us*, John?" inquired her sister.

"Because I considered that young ladies ought not to have pocket-money enough to

enable them to buy pictures," replied John Maitland;—"and to the minor relief of Missish Charity, such a man as Verelst would never stoop. He has the soul of a genius, and the courage of a lion!"—

"Which does not, however, appear to be shared by his family," observed Laura; "since you say that his daughter was too timid to sing at the Opera?"

"Esther is a bit of a lioness, I admit, in her way," said Captain Blencowe, with a smile; adding, in a lower voice, and with a glance at the old Colonel—"But what chance has even a lioness, when opposed to a set of tigers?"

Miss Maitland did not choose to hear, or, at all events, to smile, as he expected.

"It seems to me, my dear John," said she, still remonstrating with her brother, "that the man, not too proud to give lessons to Mr. Basil Annesley, need not be too proud to afford them to Laura Maitland. I *want* a drawing-

master.—Mamma has promised me a drawing-master——"

"But how do you know, my dear, that this Verelst man is a competent master?"—interrupted Lady Maitland.

"Do you not hear, mamma, that Colonel Carrington has been offered three times the price of his picture?"—observed Laura, less reverently than feelingly.

"A man may paint very well himself, and have great conceptions of his art," observed the old Colonel, "who is incapable of imparting instruction to others."

"Very *sensibly* observed!" remarked Lady Maitland, who appeared to have no great leaning towards the indigent drawing-master.

"At all events, one might do something for the daughter," observed Lucy. "If she sang at the Ancient Concert last year, she must understand her business. We have long been talking of getting up some quartettes with Colonel Loftus, and Sir Watkin. Miss Verelst

might be of material use to us.—Supposing I write to engage her?"

"You are very easily interested, my dear Lucy, in Basil Annesley's *protégée!*" said her brother, with a shrug of the shoulders. "You are not half so good to mine!—I have two or three chorus-singers to recommend to you."

"But not the daughters of meritorious artists in distress!"—said his sister, with indignation.

"The 'meritorious' and 'distress' you have taken solely upon Blencowe's showing; who never tells truth but once a-week—and this is *not* his day. However, if you mean to oblige Annesley, who, I know, is a vast favourite of yours, you will scarcely effect it by bringing Esther Verelst into contact with Colonel Loftus, or any other fine gentleman of the staring Carrington School. Believe me, he would much rather let the whole family starve in decent privacy."

"It is easy enough for fine gentlemen of

the prating Maitland School to talk lightly of *starving*," retorted his sister; "but I assure you, John——"

At that moment the butler, having entered the room, whispered, more closely than is usual for butlers to whisper in drawing-rooms, a message to Lady Maitland.

"Tell him Lord Maitland is out," was her ladyship's audible reply.

"I have told him so repeatedly, already, my lady," was the butler's rejoinder. "He particularly wishes to know whether his lordship dines at home."

"Of course he does,—yet stay—I really cannot tell," said her ladyship, apparently enlightened by her second thoughts. "But if Lord Maitland does not dine at home, he dines at White's."

The butler left the room noiselessly, as every well-bred ghost and well-bred butler retreats from sight; and Laura Maitland again renewed her interrogations respecting Basil's

Esther. "Was she handsome or ugly,—tall or short,—her voice a soprano or mezzo soprano?"—

"She is a monstrous pretty girl, with a monstrous pretty voice, I can tell you; or Annesley would not have worn himself out at elbows paying debts for her father," cried John, almost out of patience with her pertinacity.

"I never heard anything so impertinent," now burst from the lips of Lady Maitland, who was again colloquizing in whispers with the mysterious butler. "Tell him I *never* see people on business!—If he call to-morrow at breakfast, Wilson, (say Lord Maitland breakfasts at eleven,) he will be most likely to see him."

"I rather think *not*, my lady; for my lord particularly desired that this person might *never* be admitted to him," said the grave Mr. Wilson, with *malice prepense*, to avenge certain unexpiated wrongs of his own,

upon her ladyship and her ladyship's daughters.

"Tell him what you are *desired!*" said Lady Maitland, in a haughty tone.

"I have done my best to send him away," said Wilson. "But he has stationed himself in the library, my lady, and will not leave the house. He says it is essential (if my lord is *really* out) that he should have an audience of your ladyship."

"I shall certainly not expose myself to an interview with a stranger—a man of whom I know nothing!"—said Lady Maitland, with manifestly increasing agitation.

"What is all this, mother?"—inquired John, who had now caught here and there a few words of the conversation.

"Merely that there is a person below, who insists upon seeing your father."

"Some impertinent fellow of a tradesman, I suppose, with a large account to make up, (they have always large accounts to make

up!)—Well!—*we* insist too, Wilson!—We insist upon his taking himself off! Lord Maitland is not, and Lady Maitland does not *choose* to be, at home."

"It is not a tradesman, Sir," said the butler aloud, for the benefit of the party. "If it had been a tradesman, I should not have presumed to trouble her ladyship. The gentleman came in his own carriage, which is still at the door."

"My tailor always visits me in his cab," said Blencowe,—"except when he brings his bill, when he comes in his chariot."

"If your tailor drive such a deuced fine pair of bloods as this fellow," said John Maitland, who, from the front drawing-room, had taken a survey, in the interim, of the equipage of the mysterious guest, which was waiting at the door,—"he is less a tailor than you take him for!"

"Go down and speak to him, John," said Lady Maitland, by this time reassured. "I

dare say it is somebody out of Yorkshire, about electioneering business."

And for once,—moved, perhaps, by some latent curiosity of his own, to ascertain the proprietor of such a capital pair of horses,—young Maitland exhibited the utmost alacrity of filial obedience.

When he had left the room, old Carrington, who was inquisitiveness itself, began to fidget in his stock to a degree that almost threatened dislocation to his ostrich-like throat. At one moment, he had been on the point of offering Lady Maitland to accompany her son. To assuage his restless curiosity concerning the pertinacious visitor, he had no resource but to fall once more upon the Verelsts, in the hope of picking a third course of scandal out of the remnants of the feast.

Just, however, as he was beginning,—"I am assured by Loftus that Verelst's second daughter—that beautiful Salome,"—he was again interrupted.

With a face pale as death, John Maitland rushed back into the room.

"Why could you not tell me at once, mother," said he, sinking into a chair, "that it was that damnable A. O.!"——

CHAPTER VII.

Look through mine eyes with thine. True wife!
Around my heart thine arms entwine.
My other dearer life in life,
Look through my very soul with thine!
Untouched with further shade of years
May those kind eyes for ever dwell!
For they have shed too many tears
Dear eyes! Since first I loved them well!—

TENNYSON.

THE humblest hovel of a village acquires temporary distinction from the periodical blossoming of the fine old honeysuckle adorning its crumbling walls, and investing tho desolate place with beauty and fragrance; and even into the miserable lodging of a gloomy city, momentary brightness may be infused by the

chance introduction of a summer flower, whose rich perfumes bring tidings of a happier world elsewhere.

So was it with the humble abode of Verelst the painter. Nothing could be more dull, more dreary, more dispiriting, than the spot. The house, of which his lodgings occupied the first and second floors, was old and disjointed; and though an ancient stone mansion becomes picturesque when falling into ruins, the slight and ill-conditioned London houses, run up by bricklayers' contracts, degenerate, at the end of a century, into a collection of creaking boards, without a perpendicular line or right angle perceptible in the whole construction. Shrunken doors, and ill-fitting windows, admit eddies of air in all directions; while the sallow paint, dingy floors, smoky ceilings, and rickety stairs, present a miserable and dispiriting combination.

In Verelst's lodgings, selected for the ad-

vantage of the better light reaching the artist's chamber over the open space of a small burying-ground backing on South Audley-street, all was as clean as care and friction could make it. But the care applied to the burnishing of shabby furniture renders its inferiority only more prominent; and no person accustomed to the resorts of luxury, or even to habits of comfort, could have entered Verelst's apartments on the day they were first engaged by the poor painter, without experiencing the heavy depression arising from the survey of utter discomfort.

He had not been established three days, however, before those cheerless rooms had assumed the importance acquired by the roughest casket enshrining some precious object. Two beings, more graceful of form and feature than even the imagination of the gifted painter could have supplied, were dispensing a charm over the place; and, in addition to the gentle presence of Esther and Salome, the rooms were

brightened by a variety of those trivial but striking objects which betoken the presence of an artist—intrinsically valueless, so as to be compatible with poverty—yet indicative of superior intelligence and refinement.

On wooden brackets against the wall were placed two of the finest pictures of Verelst, which not only concealed the faded paper, but created an atmosphere of grace and poetry, where all before was matter of fact. Beside the fire-place, in a recess, formed by the abutting chimney usual in old-fashioned houses, stood a curious carved cabinet, common enough in the quaint old cities of Holland and Germany, but acquiring a certain dignity amid the common-place vulgarity of a London lodging-house. On the top of this, lay a thick, strange-looking volume, apparently as antiquated and curious as the cabinet itself; for its clumsy silver clasps were blackened with age, and the binding was of the dingy and solemn character peculiar to monastic libraries.

This precious book was an object of all but idolatry to the painter. On removing to that wretched house from the abode in Bermondsey in which he had installed himself, on his first arrival from Germany, Verelst carried it devoutly under his arm, leaving the care of his goods and chattels, and even of his infirm wife, to the hands of his daughters. The utmost extremity of poverty would not have induced him to part with it,—in the first place, because it was a gift—a token of gratitude from one of his scholars, the young Count of Ehrenstein, who, on quitting the University, had despatched it from his ancestral castle in the Odenwald to his old master; in the second, because it was a treasure of no less magnitude than the sketch-book of Albert Durer.

Great must have been the importance of any individual in the eyes of Verelst ere he admitted him to view the contents of that sacred volume; and, during the three years of his residence in England, Basil Annesley alone had

beheld those venerable clasps unlocked in his honour.

If the truth must be told, the favour was somewhat thrown away. Those sublimer touches of art which it requires the eye of an artist to detect,—those curious insights into the mysteries of nature which demand initiation on the part of the spectator to whom they are demonstrated,—were as much lost upon the young guardsman, as the beauties of a Phidian *torso* on the eye of a child, who sees only a headless trunk, defaced and time-worn, where the virtuoso beholds the breathing *chef-d'œuvre* of the first of sculptors.

Basil Annesley, however, though too frank for dissimulation on ordinary matters, was careful not to wound the pride of the sensitive artist by exhibiting his indifference. He had conferred too many favours on Verelst, to mortify him by disparaging his only treasure. Even the weaknesses, moreover, of the father of Esther were sacred in his sight.

It would have afforded no consolation to the enthusiastic painter, to learn that any human being could be blind enough to appreciate what he estimated as his own puny efforts of art, far beyond the curious jottings and outlines by which the quaint old master had attempted to lay by stores for the aid of future invention, in his mysterious repository; snatches of the picturesque,—of striking effects,—of graceful combinations,—which displayed, in many instances to eyes profane, only uncouth blottings and unmeaning devices. For nothing could exceed the contempt with which Verelst regarded the works to which the exigencies of his position compelled him to descend.

The wants of his family obliged him to paint down to the taste of the most unimaginative nation in Europe; and the two noble works constantly before his eyes,—for which he had never so much as received an offer, but which, during their composition, and the two years devoted to their execution,

had appeared to contain the germs of fame and fortune, nay, in his more enthusiastic moments, to foreshow glimmerings of immortality,—afforded a perpetual memento that subjects taken from the *Niebelungen Lied*, even if treated with the power of a Caravaggio, and the grace of a Correggio, possess not half the charm, in English eyes, of a sporting scene in the Highlands, or some comicality of Cockney life!

The bitter lesson was now learned. But it had required the contemptuous refusal of a dozen picture-dealers to convince Verelst that the higher efforts of modern genius were valueless, unless when stamped as saleable by the prefix of a well-known name, accredited by the magic letters R.A.;—whereas for the humorous *croquis*, and sporting studies, such as Colonel Carrington had found so profitable a possession, a ready market was at command.

By the sale of these the artist maintained his family; and he might have maintained them

in opulence, could he have brought himself fully and entirely to the level of his position. But the mind of Verelst was pitched to a lofty key. To *him* it was as much an effort to descend to these profitable puerilities, as for other men to attain to the higher inspirations of art; and often, when engaged to complete for the trade some vulgar series of military groups, or hunting adventures, he would fling away the pencil with disgust, and, snatching the palette, in a fit of desperation, paint out some former picture, in order to give existence to a new design—the faint shadowing of some poetical idea —never, alas! to be fully developed.

For there were no Roman princes, no luxurious cardinals, to give food to the family of the necessitous artist while abandoning himself to the nobler promptings of his genius! When mildly remonstrated with by his feeble wife, he replied by citing the victory he had already attained over himself, by producing for lucre-sake works revolting to his taste.

But it was like converting a lance of polished steel into a homely instrument of husbandry, to abstract the soul of Verelst from the higher walks of his art.

It is true that, in his two girls, he had unconscious flatterers, strongly inciting him to the cultivation of his nobler aspirations. Whenever, in irresistible moments of fervour, the poor artist gave the reins to his imagination, so as to produce some wild but exquisite design, illustrative of the poetry of his native country, Salome and Esther, by their fond enthusiasm, not only stimulated his exertions, but almost repaid them. Nevertheless, their murmured applauses, their glistening eyes, their flushing cheeks—grateful as was the tribute to his heart, not only as a token of affection, but as indicative of the possession of genius sympathetic with his own—did not suffice to satisfy his weekly creditors, or defray the rent of even his inconsiderable lodging.

The poor paralytic mother, whose sickness

was the real source of their poverty, often entreated the two girls to be more sparing in their admiration. With the wisdom of experience, the infirm wife of Verelst recognised the futility of struggling against destiny. *She* knew, that to achieve the laurels of glory requires more than the mere possession of genius; that there must be favourable coincidences of time and place—and, above all, of national tastes and prosperity, to create a field for the triumph of art, and the renown of the artist.

Mrs. Verelst was a woman of no common order. Born of an opulent family, she had eloped in early girlhood from her father's house with the enthusiastic artist; and, ill-prepared by habits or education for the life of privation she had embraced, her health had fallen a sacrifice, and increased the evil. From the period of her younger daughter's birth, in consequence of premature exertion, she had become crippled; a burthen upon the family, save for the pains she was enabled to bestow

upon the education of the girls. Though enfeebled by infirmity, she was unwearied in imparting to her daughters the accomplishments in which she excelled; and even now, though confined at all times to an easy chair, and often to her bed, her industrious hands were constantly exercised for the benefit of the family.

Sore had been the trial to this patient invalid to uproot herself from the humble but cheerful home at Heidelberg, to which she had been so long habituated, and exchange the view from her windows over the rippling waters of the Neckar, and the crowning heights of the green forests beyond, for the foggy, smoky, cheerless limitation of a narrow London street. Though of British extraction, she had never abided in England; and became as quickly conscious as any foreign visitor, of the oppressive cost of ordinary enjoyment in a city which supplies no gratuitous pleasures. If, however, either the mother or daughters

pined after the purer atmosphere and franker sociability of Heidelberg, they were cautious not to afflict by their lamentations the inconsiderate man by whose want of caution they had been driven into exile.

The artist enjoyed in his family an impunity something between the reverence accorded to a prophet, and the indulgence conceded to an ailing child. His whims were studied, his foibles respected. Whatever evils befel them, it was the common care that they should fall lightest on the father. Among themselves, the disinterestedness of mind and exaltation of character which had reduced them to ruin, commanded a degree of respect that did them honour; and the two girls seemed to feel that they could not better testify their affection for their suffering mother, than by duty towards the improvident father she so dearly loved.

"How lonesome we have been, these four days past!" observed Verelst, as he stood re-

touching a picture upon the easel, the completion of which he had a thousand times forsworn.—" Not a single visitor the whole of this week!"—

The two girls, who sat working at the same embroidery-frame, waiting till their mother, who was reclining in her arm-chair, should feel disposed to resume the book she had been reading aloud to them the greater part of the morning, looked at each other and smiled,—or rather mutually refrained from a smile; for the only guests who ever crossed their threshold were Basil Annesley, and three or four print-sellers and picture-dealers, by whom Verelst was occasionlly employed.

" I want cheering up, for the continuation of my military groupings!"—resumed the artist. " I have been obliged to take up the brush instead of the pencil to-day, for want of some one to advise me respecting that charge of Polish lancers."

" He is out of town, father. He is gone into

Hampshire,"—said Esther, vaguely enough, if in reply to her father's observation.

"Besides," added the feeble voice of Mrs. Verelst, who, though sitting with her eyes closed, was not dozing, as they had supposed, "even if he *were* in town, Mr. Annesley has sense enough to know that it is not expedient for him to be a daily visitor in a house like ours,—that it must be injurious to *him*, and fatal to *us*."

"Why so?" inquired the painter, without raising his eyes from his work. "He used to come to us every day, at Heidelberg?"

"He was your pupil,—he was eagerly studying the German language, and society was an object to him."

"Not more an object to him there, than *his* society here to *me*."

"Besides, Mr. Annesley was then fifteen, and Esther and Salome children of eleven and twelve."

"And is there not precisely the same difference of age between them now?"

"Certainly! But there is a very great difference in the construction others might place upon their intimacy!"

"*Their* intimacy!—My dear wife, you are dreaming!" cried the painter, almost smiling at her simplicity, and not in the least suspecting his own. "*Their* intimacy!—Surely you do not suppose that this excellent young man, who, though I never was able to endue him with much artistic perception, made good progress under my hands, (as his *aquarelle* yonder of the old Castle of Heidelberg, pasted into the lid of Esther's work-box, can testify,) this promising scholar of mine, I say, who has been of such essential service to us during our sojourn in this inhospitable country, cannot come to visit his old master, and advise him in his compositions so as to adapt them to the vulgar appetites of his customers, without provoking remarks by his condescension?—At all events, what have my daughters to do with it?—It is not Salome's pencils he sits pointing.

It is not Esther's drawings, of which he suggests the subjects."

"Mr. Annesley is gone down to visit his invalid mother, papa," interposed Esther, apprehensive, perhaps, that her father might take cognizance of her tingling cheeks, or his wife consider it necessary to inspire him with a more worldly view of their relative position.

"*Has* he a mother?"—inquired the artist,—who took little heed of the ordinary business of life. "I always fancied from his independence that he was an orphan, and his own master."

"Do you not remember our first interest in him at Heidelberg originating in the letters he shewed us from Lady Annesley?"

"True,—I remember!—Grave, cordial, heart-stirring letters.—But as he never mentioned her here, I thought she might have died in the interim. And so she is an invalid?—the reason, perhaps, Rachael, why he interests himself so kindly in your illness,—

and is always suggesting some comfort or relief for you. It is such a kind-hearted creature! I miss him, after a few days absence, as I should miss one of *you*, were you to go away from me."

"Mr. Annesley is very kind, very affable, very condescending," said Mrs. Verelst, coldly, as if to give a discouraging view of their terms of friendship.

"But surely we are of as much service to HIM, mother, as he is to papa in the composition and sale of his drawings?" — observed Salome. "Mr. Annesley has a charming voice; but it is Esther's instructions which have enabled him to do it justice."

"So long as he comes as a pupil," persisted Mrs. Verelst, "he comes on appropriate terms. But highly born as he is, and, as I presume, of good hereditary fortune, there can be no equality, and, consequently, no real friendship, between him and us. We are people earning our subsistence by our exertions.—He is a gentleman—a fine gentleman."

"He is a *man!*"—cried Verelst, suddenly throwing down his brush, and assuming a tone of energy very unusual to him.—"He is my benefactor, too:—but I should hate myself, and despise *him*, if I thought *that* any obstacle to his being my friend."

His wife remained silent; aware of the hazard of introducing suspicion into that simplest of human hearts. A woman's tact forewarned her that, if made to feel the danger and delicacy of their position as regarded Basil Annesley, he would feel it so acutely as to render all further intimacy between them impossible.

Before Verelst had resumed his brush or the girls recovered their apprehensions that some unpleasant explanation was about to ensue, a knock was heard at the street door, and a step on the stairs; but neither the one nor the other of a nature to agitate the daughters or rejoice the father by a hope of Annesley's arrival.

"So, Sir," cried an austere-looking man, whose complexion vied with that of one of the crackled china vases forming part of his stock in trade as a dealer in objects of *virtù*.—"I have been expecting to hear news of you this week or more.—How go on, pray, the pair of battle-pieces I ordered in November, and which were to be finished clean off by Christmas?"

"I told you, when I undertook them, that the completion must be uncertain," replied Verelst, resuming his work on recognising in his visitor the proprietor of a rococo shop, to whom he occasionally furnished cabinet pictures on given subjects, and at prices which rendered the connexion far from advantageous to himself.—"You may remember I informed you that I was occupied in a series of military illustrations, which is about to be lithographed for a periodical work; and which I must finish before I commence any new work."

"Yes! You said you had a job on hand

for some printseller.—But *this* thing, I conclude, does not form one of your military groups?"—said the stranger, pointing to a design of the King of Thule, from Schiller's ballad, which was beginning to make some progress on the canvas of Verelst.

"No,—this is a work of imagination, executed for my own pleasure,"—replied the artist, coldly.

"So I should guess:—leastwise, it's plaguy unlike to promote the pleasure of other people!"—observed the facetious Mr. Stubbs; sinking deliberately into the chair which had been courteously placed for him by Salome, on his entrance.

"It's a thousand pities, Mr. Thingumee, that you keep idling your time away in this fashion, and disapp'inting your empl'yers, when you might make a mint of money by sticking to business.—I call it business to paint picturs such as folks can understand, and such as folks is consequently likely to buy. What

could *I* do, I should like to know, with such an outlandish piece of goods as you've afore you? Ask any man as has exper'ence of such things, what modern picturs have found the best market. He'll tell you out and out, those with good straight for'ard, intelligible subjects,—such as Gainsborough's Pigs, or Holmes's Cut Finger, or Heaphy's Crossing the Brook, or such like.—The English are sensible folks, Mr. Thingumee, and don't like to be asked to step up into the clouds, so long as they've their own tight little island to stand on."

"I have always heard, Sir," replied Verelst, (in English somewhat better than his own, for twenty years of wedded life had familiarized the artist with the language of his wife,) "that there is no country where the higher branches of art are better estimated than in England; or where higher prices have been paid for the *chef d'œuvres* of the ancient masters."

"I grant you, Sir,—I grant you!—As a matter of trade,—as a safe investment. John Bull is a man of merchandize, and ready to buy up standard picturs, just as he used to buy toolips in Holland, when toolips was matter of spekilation. But if you fancy, that 'cause he gives two thousand guineas for a Claude which there's a good chance of selling to the Emperor of Russia for three, he is like to give a long price for such a rigmarole concern as the one you are wasting your time on, (instead of finishing picturs you've contracted for,) I can tell you you'll find yourself in the wrong box, and no mistake!"

The girls looked up anxiously from their work, dreading lest their father's reply to this coarse apostrophe should be an angry one. It was some relief to them to find that he was smiling to himself, with the silent contempt of superiority.

Mr. Stubbs was evidently disappointed.—Accustomed to wrangle with the persons in his employ, he had hoped to raise a breeze.

"There's *one* p'int on which I beg we may understand one another, my good friend," said he, with an insulting wag of the head,—"and that is, that none of your designs for the lethography trade is to be reproduced in my picturs. I bargained, please to recollect, that my couple of battle-pieces was to be strictly original, and the copyright my own; and it won't suit my purpose to have 'em a figuring in black and white in every printseller's window."

"I understood, Sir, that the pictures you wanted were to be skirmishes in the time and costume of the middle ages,—something in the style of Salvator's battle-pieces.—The drawings I am supplying, are to illustrate the military costume of the modern nations of Europe."

"Ay, some'hat in the style of Salvator!"—said the dealer, catching at the expression, and overlooking the argument of the painter. "Now, I tell ye what, Mr. What's-your-name,—If you've a mind to put out your strength in them 'ere two picturs, why I'm prepared to

do the thing handsome by you. I spoke of eight pounds, or thereabouts, for the pair——"

"You offered ten guineas," said Verelst, firmly, without removing his hand or eye from the canvas.

"Well, p'rhaps it *may* have been guineas,—I can't say, without casting my eye over my mem'randum-book, which I don't carry about me. But, as I was a saying, if you've a mind to make these picturs what they ought to be, I don't care if I go as far as fifteen pound for the pair,—provided I secure the copyright, and the picturs is high and dry in my house by the first of April."

"You have fixed upon a curious epoch, Sir, for the completion of such a bargain!" observed Verelst, with a quiet smile. "But I can undertake no such limitation. When I bring you my pictures, you shall purchase them or not, as you think proper, and on such terms as we may then agree upon."

The indignant Mr. Stubbs, who had not often found the poor artist so cool at a bargain

now began to surmise that Verelst had fallen into the hands of some rival dealer, and was beginning to be better acquainted with his own value. In order to satisfy himself on this point, he persisted in his bullying tone.

"This wont do for me, Sir!" said he, striking his stick upon the ground, with a vehemence that caused the poor invalid, whose nerves were so studiously respected in the family, to bound in her chair.—"I've got my customers to satisfy; and when I've promised a gentleman to have some'hat ready for him by a certain day, why, I choose to be punctooal."

"My pictures, then, have been ordered of you?" said the artist coolly, arranging on his palette the colour prepared for the gray beard of the king of Thule.

"I said no sich thing, that I'm aware on!" retorted the dealer. "Gentlemen who is a furnishing their galleries, or their houses, comes to me and says, 'Stubbs, we want a pair o' picturs, for a dining-room, some'hat in

the animal or battle line, three feet by two, or two-and-twenty inches by fourteen, as the case may be,—some'hat as 'll look well in an oak frame, or a Louis XIV. frame, according as it happens.'—Well, Sir, I'm bound to answer: 'I've got nothing of the size by me, my lord, but if you'll look in next month, maybe I shall be able to satisfy you.'—Sir, if his lordship looks in and finds nothing, he's a right to look elsewhere, and be displeased into the bargain."

The artist smiled. He was beginning to appreciate the line of business pursued by Mr. Stubbs.

"What I have to say, therefore," pursued the dealer, assuming a milder tone, "is, that if you've a mind to clench the bargain, I'm willing to leave a five-pound note or so with you, by way of earnest."

Verelst was just then so anxiously employed retouching the mouth of the king of Thule, that he paid no attention.

In another moment, Esther had stolen to-

wards her father, and was whispering in his ear the offer made by his visitor; and perhaps suggesting motives for its acceptance. So, at least, Mr. Stubbs would probably have inferred, but that his whole attention was, at that moment, engrossed by the beautiful face thus suddenly presented to his admiration.

"Why, as sure as life, that's the original of the Gurl and Goat you sold me last Spring!" —said he, unceremoniously contemplating the graceful form and beautiful countenance of the artist's daughter; who, unable to surmise that it was in *such* terms her father's exquisite picture of the Esmeralda, from Victor Hugo's romance of "Nôtre Dame," was likely to be qualified, stood regarding him with amazement.

"A pretty plague that pictur' brought upon my shoulders!"—added the dealer, shrugging them, as if still conscious of the infliction.

"I thought you told me you had sold it?" said Verelst, calmly.

"Ay; but I didn't tell you who I'd sold it to;—and I know that another time I'd as lief drive a bargain with the devil! However, if ever he should come again for a companion, (as has once or twice happened, Mr. Thingumee, with picturs of your'n,) I'm glad, at least, to know I can get rid of him with noos of where the face is to be found, concerning which he made such a deuce's own to do in my shop."

The curiosity of Verelst was, by this time, sufficiently awakened to induce him to ask the questions anticipated by his visitor.

"Why, you're to know," resumed Mr. Stubbs, in reply, (and as he spoke, both the mother and daughters suspended their needles to listen,) "you are to know, that, finding the pictur' hang on hand, and nowise taking, for not a soul of the nobs as deals at my shop could make head or tail of the story with which it seemed to be connected—I stuck it up one day in my window, along with the Nankin

vases, and shells, and minerals, and what not, as I always does with picturs I find unsaleable to the thorough-going ammytoors.—Well, Sir! scarce was it on show, before a crowd was collected round the winders—some laughing at the ideer of a goat with such horns and feet as them in the pictur', but most on 'em attracted by seeing anything with fresh bright colours in a shop like mine, which seldom has anything in it but the meller tones and rich colouring o' the old masters. Well, Sir—among these starers was an old gentleman, in a decent enough suit o' clothes, who stood there a matter of an hour, a-staring at the pictur'.—Thinks I to myself, 'a customer!'—for though there was nothing about such a coat as his'n as looked as if it had a purse in its pocket, I've seen many a Jew dealer with thousands and thousands at command, go the length of a price in three figurs for a pictur', yet with patches at his elbows.—However, off marched the old fellow at last, without so much as a

question asked in the shop!—Somehow or another, I guessed I hadn't seen the last on him; and, next morning, having set up the Gurl and Goat in the winder, for a second chance, the boy a-watching the shop soon calls out to me, as I was a-breakfasting in the back parlour,—'Master, master, here's the old chap again, watching the winder as though he'd have a snatch at the gem-box.'—Up I starts, Sir,—and, seeing his eyes so fixed again upon the pictur', I stepped out on the pavement, as if I wanted to arrange the awning.

"'A pretty thing *that*,' said I, as if by way of axing pardon for putting him aside;—and if you'll believe me, when the old feller looked up to answer me, his eyes was full o' tears!—I was nigh laughing outright, to think any one could find matter to cry at in a daub of a Gurl with a Goat.—Upon which, instead of noticing my civility, the whimperer shewed his manners by marching off. A good riddance! thinks I—for I'm not one o' those who consi-

ders an idle crowd round a shop any advantage. Customers is seldom found in such assemblings."

"But I thought you told us this person had purchased the Esmeralda?" said Verelst.

"You'd have been a conjuror to have guessed as much, I can tell you, if you'd seen the individual as I sold it to," rejoined the dealer. "I thought no more, in course, o' the old chap; though my boy a'ter'ards told me that not an evening passed but, as soon as the lamps was lighted, he'd pass by the shop, as if on his way elsewhere, but never without casting a longing look at the winder; and ten minutes a'ter'ards, back again, no doubt on the same errand, though he took care not to stand gaping, as he had at first. Well, Sir—'twas autumn-time, and no bus'ness stirring; so I took the opportoonity, just then, of my annival visit to Margate. When I came back, the pictur' was gone,—within ten shillings, too, of the price I'd first set upon it:—and Mrs.

Stubbs, who'd been left in charge o' the shop, informed me, that one day an old Jew, with whom we'd often had dealings in the lapidary line, after making a deal with her for some engraved stones, hintalios, and cammyos, inquired, in a sort o' careless way, the price o' the Gurl and Goat.

"At first, he scouted it at the price named, but seemed cur'ous to learn how it had come into our hands. Now, it's a rule in our bus'ness, Mr. Thingumee, never to give explanations o' that natur' to nobody, 'specially to dealers. So my missus said that I was away on a scursion; and that she knowed no more than nothin' at all about none o' the picturs, except the price marked on 'em. So, not to trouble you with more p'ticlars than necessary, at last they came to a deal; and a'ter he'd book'd up for the lot, says the old Jew, 'I'd give a trifle,' says he, 'to know the artist as painted that pictur'!' My wife hinted as much as that maybe he was dead and gone—

that the pictur' was p'rhaps an old 'un.—'How can that be,' says the Jew, 'when the romance itself is only of recent date?' My wife know'd nothing about romances—not she——"

"But I told you, Sir, that my picture represented a scene from the novel of Nôtre Dame."

"If you did, I've other matters to think of than to stuff my head with the stories of novels! —Well, Sir, a'ter the Jew had fairly made his bargain, my missus swears that he stood a-looking at the pictur' with tears in his eyes, all as one as the gentleman I had noticed in the street; and she fancied she heard him a-muttering atween his teeth,—'I never thought to have had a sight o' that blessed face again!'—However, Mrs. Stubbs is a nervous, fanciful, stericky body, and apt to take conundrums into her head. 'Where shall I send the pictur' home to?' says she, by way of putting an end to his vagaries.—'*Send!*' says he. 'I'll

carry it myself.' 'The boy's got nothing to do, Sir,' says Mrs. Stubbs, purlitely; 'and I'm always glad to obleege a customer.'—'I'll carry it myself,' persisted the surly old fellow, without so much as a thank-ye. And without more ado, he hoisted the Gurl and Goat on his arm, and out he trudged. My missus, who was somewhat thrown a-back by his p'remptory air, no sooner sees him out o' the shop, than she finds lying on the counter the packet of hintalios, for which the Jew had just paid down forty pounds odd on the nail: so, having a mind to know what became o' the pictur', she bid the boy hurry a'ter him, and be sure not to give him the packet till he'd follored him home. According to the lad's account—— but maybe I'm a-tiring *you* ladies?" said Mr. Stubbs, interrupting himself, on perceiving the breathless attention he was exciting in the little family.

"On the contrary, Sir, we are deeply in-

terested,"— replied Mrs. Verelst, with her usual well-bred gentleness.

"Well then, ma'am, as I was a-saying, 'cording to the lad's account, the old chap hadn't perceeded many streets, which he did charily and cautiously, avoiding jostling with foot-passengers, as if he was a guarding a living gurl and goat he was fond of, instead of a pictur' o' no p'rticlar valooe, he looked round cautiously, as though he'd a guess at being watched.—Maybe he'd noticed the lad in the shop; for, having gone the length o' the street, and stopped again, and still found the young feller at his heels, he asked him short round in plain words, what was his bus'ness?—The boy had nothin' for it, but to give up the parcel, expecting, maybe, a trifle for his pains,—the lot being of sich valooe. But the old feller gave nothin' but a grunt,—and having pocketed his packet, on again with the pictur'!"—

"And did he still follow him, Sir?" inter-

rupted Esther, as Mr. Stubbs paused for breath; or perhaps, like other orators, to stimulate the curiosity of his hearers.

"He had his missus's orders, and that was enough!" said the dealer, fancying every one as well aware as himself of the absolute sceptre wielded by his helpmate. "More cautious than at first, he crept on at a distance, till he watched the old man into a house in Greek Street, Soho. But, Lord! what was the good o' *that?* When, on his return from this precious fox-chase, Mrs. Stubbs looked in B'yle's Guide and the D'rectory, one a'ter t'other, the number pointed out by the lad was missing in both.—The house was all as one as uninhabited.—H'wever, on hearing his story, it struck *me*, maybe the Jew who seemed so mightily taken with the pictur' might have a fancy for a companion: so—the first idle day, off I set to the house.—The shutters was all shut, Sir; and the doorway as dirty as if neither broom or scrubbing-brush had touched it

for years!—H'wever, I knocked and rang, and rang and knocked; and hollow enough all sounded within!—But the hollow sound of my own rings and knocks was all the good I got; and a'ter half an hour wasted, I saw I might as well give up the bus'ness."

"You did *not* gain admittance, then?" inquired the artist, curious to learn the mode of the picture-dealer's proceedings in such cases.

"I did another day, Sir;—but only by management,—and plaguy bad management it was! A matter of six weeks a'ter'ards, I was passing through Greek Street, on bus'ness of my own, when what should I spy but a smart cab a-waiting at the door o' the old deserted house,—though for the matter o' that, it was just as much shut up as ever, and just as grimy and dull! Up I went, h'wever; and, by way o' not frighting the spiders, if I turned out to be mistaken in s'posing the owner o' the cab admitted within, gave a very gentle

ring. A dirty old 'oman—a fit match to the place—opened it in a *stanter*, as they say in French.

"'I've bus'ness, Ma'am, with your master,' says I,—and immediately walked in so coolly, that no oppersition did she think of offering. The old cat made no move to show me further; so I made bold to open the front parlour door. —All dark as pitch, and smelling as mouldy as a family vault!—Shutting the door gently, I thought I'd try my luck at the back 'un. Locked!—However, the n'ise I made, trying to open it, reached them as was within, just as their v'ices reached *me;*—and in a trice, the lock turned, and the door was placed ajar. ——I just leave *you* to guess, Mrs. Thingumee, who was within!"

"I fear it would be wasting your time, Sir, as well as my own," replied Mrs. Verelst, to whom the inquiry appeared to be addressed.

"Why, neither more nor less than, as large as life, the old gentleman whom I had noticed

so often at my winder, staring at the 'Gurl and the Goat!' "—

"But you said there were other voices——"

"Ay—and t'other v'ice—('twas my business to have known without knocking, so often as it had sounded in my shop!)—t'other v'ice was that of my best customer—the Duke of Rochester; to whom I've sold picturs and statooes to the amount of no matter how many thousands of pounds."

"You were admitted, then, into their presence?"—

"Not I;—nor I hadn't no wish, when I saw I was an introoder, or at least was told so by the old fogrum who opened the door.——I hadn't a guess *then*, what sort of treason they were locked-up a-hatching together; and a'ter being unceremoniously walked out o' the house by the old chap, who wouldn't so much as listen to what I had to say in explanation, I didn't care to inquire.—But a week ago, or so, I had an ugly money transaction with a

fine lady customer of mine, who'd given me a bill of her husband's in payment, as required for me to follow up the parties; and while so doing, I was sent from pillar to post, till at last I got referred to one A. O., in Greek-street, Soho. The murder was out, Sir!—the old Jew, who bought the pictur' of me, was neither more nor less than one o' the agents employed on such errands by the famous Money-lender!"—

"I am sorry my picture should have been the means of exposing you to such a disagreeable adventure," observed Verelst. "It seems, however, to have been, in a great measure, one of your own seeking."—

"What do you mean by my own seeking, Sir?" cried Mr. Stubbs, again striking the point of his stick against the floor. "For as little as you seem to understand, Mr. Thingumee, of the ways of carrying on bus'ness in England, I'd have you to know that——"

The loud and angry tones of the dealer were

at that moment interrupted by the sudden entrance of a person whose ascent of the creaking stairs had been drowned in his vociferation. The voice of Mr. Stubbs now, however, became alone silent; while every other person in the room uttered an exclamation of delight to welcome the arrival of—Basil Annesley!

CHAPTER VIII.

Love took up the glass of Time, and turn'd it in his glowing hands,
Every moment, lightly shaken, run itself in golden sands;
Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all its chords with might—
Smote the chord of self, that, trembling, passed in music out of sight!

TENNYSON.

No sooner did the picture-dealer notice the courteous familiarity with which the young guardsman accosted the artist, and the almost deferential tone in which he inquired after the health of Mrs. Verelst, than he rose instinctively from his seat. There was no mistaking the fact that the guest belonged to the order of society which he

regarded as his customers ; or that the painter's family lived with him on terms of intimacy amounting to friendship. Coarse as he was, Mr. Stubbs knew himself at that moment to be the inferior of the party.

" I will call about this little bus'ness, Sir, another time," said he, addressing Verelst, as he prepared to quit the room; and it was only as he moved slowly towards the door, that, incited perhaps by curiosity to ascertain what could have brought so fashionable-looking a young man to the fire-side of a poor painter, he recognised the rare loveliness of Salome and her sister !—

A significant smile unconsciously over-spread his features, on a discovery he considered so pregnant with evil-meaning. It was possibly the same perception that induced him, after having closed the door, and gained the staircase for departure, to return into the room, and by way of certifying the relative position of the parties, re-approach poor Verelst with a whispered

request that he would keep to himself the Greek Street secret.—

"You'll oblige me," Sir," said he, in an audible whisper, very different from that of his preceding conversations, "by refraining from all mention of the story of the gurl's picture and A. O. !"—

Had Mr. Stubbs searched the world over for a word calculated to startle the feelings of the young stranger, he could not have been more successful! The face of Annesley became instantly crimsoned. Apprehending that the vulgar fellow who thus unceremoniously addressed the father of Esther, could have no other motive for his allusion than the discovery of the difficulties from which he had extricated himself by the aid of Abednego, in order to relieve his humble friend, Basil almost trembled lest the whole affair was about to be exposed before his face by the officiousness of a stranger. It was not till after Mr. Stubbs, after bowing facetiously around him, had

again quitted the room, that Annesley breathed freely.

"That was one of my enlightened patrons, my dear Mr. Annesley," said Verelst, resuming his pencil under the cheering influence of Basil's presence—"one of those who treat me like a clod of the earth, yet expect me to exhibit the instincts and inspiration of genius!"

Basil replied by an ejaculation of disgust.

"But, my good Mr. Annesley—my dear young friend," resumed the painter, "these girls told me just now, you had been in the country nursing a sick relative. Are you quite sure you have not taken her disorder? I never saw you look so ill, since the time of your fever at Heidelberg, when we had you into our house for change of air!"

"You remind me of one of the happy epochs of my life!" cried Basil, suddenly acquiring all the bloom of which Verelst was quite justified in accusing him of being deficient.

"Ay—*now* you look somewhat more like yourself again!"—cried the painter. "*Now* you are a fitter object for an artist's studio!—You cannot imagine, my dear Sir, how I have wanted you!—The sketches cannot get on without you. If you had remained long in the country I should have been ruined!—I wanted spirits to proceed to business during your absence; but since you are here again, I will push back the King of Thule in disgrace into his corner.—Salome! bring forward the drawing-table!"—

And while the young man was bending over the chair of the invalid, inquiring anxiously into the events of the four or five last days, without heeding the garrulity of his old master, the change was accomplished. On Basil's release from his almost filial attentions to the worn and wasted, yet still beautiful invalid, all was in readiness to be set in movement, by his advice touching the helmets of Prussian lancers, and the boots of Hungarian pandours.

Taking the chair placed for him by Salome close beside the artist, he proceeded, with patient good-humour, to play the critic on the spirited military groups, in which it was indeed difficult to point out a fault, save in trifling accessories of costume. So animated were the charges, so admirable the equestrian combinations, that Basil, instead of enlarging on a few errors of equipment, fell, as usual, into rhapsodies at the spirit and originality of the whole.

It was probably the stimulus of this very enthusiasm which had been wanting to Verelst; for in a moment his chalks were in full activity, and Basil at leisure to perceive that the seat provided for him by Salome commanded a view of the embroidery frame over which the graceful heads of the two girls were stooping together. It was only natural that he should thenceforward divide his attention between the withered hand, under which was growing into life a rude bridge over a mountain torrent, hotly

defended by a legion of Tyrolese peasants, armed with the picturesque wildness of irregular warfare, against a trimly dressed detachment of French light infantry, in all the studied equipment of military array,—and the fairy fingers of the sisters, as they flew over their work.

Though the hands of the two girls were closely intertwined as they sat together, so that the slight form of the one almost effaced the still slenderer figure of the other, the eyes of Basil had no difficulty in detecting the hand so dear to him,—the hand which had trembled on his sudden entrance, —and which now, in the joy of his presence again in that chamber, was performing thrice the work effected by the less-interested Salome; who was sufficiently at her ease to contemplate, every now and then, at idle leisure, the venerable figure of her father, contrasted with that of the handsome young visitor bending over him while watching the efforts of his pencil. Placed as Salome

was, she was, of course, enabled to see that, ever and anon, his eyes wandered furtively towards Esther; from the detection of whose downcast looks he knew himself to be secure.

"Do you happen to know anything, Mr. Annesley, of a family named Maitland?"—suddenly inquired Mrs. Verelst, after exercising, perhaps, the same unnoticed scrutiny as Salome.

Annesley started, and looked confused.

"They live in Arlington-street," added Esther, in a low voice, taking this opportunity to lift her eyes to his face, and surprised, in her turn, to find it covered with conscious blushes.

"The son is a brother-officer of mine," replied he, gradually recovering his self-possession.

"It *is*, then, as we supposed, to *you* that Esther is indebted for her introduction to the family!" observed Mrs. Verelst.

"*Introduction!*" repeated Basil, in evident surprise.

"I received, an hour ago, a note, signed Lucy Maitland, begging to know my terms for tuition, and requesting me to be in Arlington-street at three o'clock to-morrow," said Esther, in explanation.

The former confusion of countenance of Basil Annesley was now a thousand times augmented. The idea of Esther Verelst—*his* Esther—a singing-mistress to those flighty girls, in that showy, heartless house, subjected to the gaze of the "string of puppies" frequenting it—exposed to the silly impertinence of Lady Maitland—condemned to all the ignominy inflicted on a teacher, by people of empty heads and callous hearts!

"And has Miss Verelst engaged herself?" said he, addressing the mother.

"She merely wrote accepting the appointment for to-morrow, when there will probably be little difficulty in adjusting the

question of terms and hours," replied the invalid.

"You do me too much honour in supposing that the recommendation came from *me*," said Annesley, after a pause, in which he had been balancing the evils likely to arise to the beautiful Esther Verelst from such a connexion, against the advantage to the necessitous family of an additional guinea a-week earned by their exertions. "I should scarcely have suggested a place likely to expose a person so timid as Est—— as Miss Verelst, to the constant notice and molestation of precisely the order of persons whose familiarity drove her from the rehearsals at the opera. The advantage to be derived would be dearly purchased by exposure to the habits of a house, of all others of my acquaintance the one into which I should be least disposed to introduce a sister of my own."

Esther was satisfied. The pang excited in her bosom by Basil's confusion at the

first mention of the name of Maitland, was gradually subsiding.

"Surely," observed Salome, little suspecting the new vexation to which she was about to give rise, "Maitland was the name of the ladies with whom we saw you that night at the opera, when Madame Branzini was so good as to lend us her box?"—

"I scarcely recollect," stammered Basil, with some embarrassment.

"Oh! yes—we met you on the stairs with a beautiful girl on your arm, whom you hurried into a carriage, and returned to assist *us*. I remember hearing it announced as that of Lady Maitland."—

"How can you recollect such trash, child?" interrupted Verelst. "Annesley! what think you of placing the stout fellow with the scythe, who is striking down the standard of France, on the broken parapet of the bridge?"—

"Admirable!" cried Basil, glad to direct his eyes towards the drawing at which he

had been hitherto only pretending to look. "It will make a modern edition of the famous battle of the Standard. But what a pity, Sir, to throw away this exquisite design on a series for which you are so miserably paid?—Why not place it in the gorge of a mountain pass, and execute it in oils?"

"Ay, why not?"—cried the artist, recalling, at that moment, to mind his order for the two battle-pieces, and justly surmising that Mr. Stubbs had neither art nor learning enough to detect the anachronism, if such a study were made the companion to a skirmish of the *condottieri* of Sir John Hawkwood and the Cardinal de Bourbon; but little suspecting the anxiety of mind which this interruption of their conversation was causing to his favourite daughter.

"Esther has been setting to music, since you have been gone, those pretty words you brought her the last time you were here," observed Mrs. Verelst, after her husband and his guest had sufficiently debated to-

gether the question of the new Battle of the Standard, which was to rival that of Leonardo.

"I thought she would like them!" cried Basil, again raising his eyes, and meeting those of Esther with a degree of frankness that almost satisfied her he was not actuated by fear of exposing his own flirtations to her examination, in opposing her entrance into the Maitland family.

"And a fine melancholy ditty she has made of them!" added her father.

"They were appropriate only to a minor key," observed Esther, in an apologetic tone.

"Will you not let me hear the ballad, and judge for myself?" inquired Basil.

"I am so afraid of not satisfying your expectation?" said Esther, rising, however, instantly from her work. "I am sure they are favourite verses of yours, or you would not have been at the trouble of copying them."

"Shew me the man who would like his favourite verses the less from hearing them

sung by such a voice as yours, Esther!"—said her father, fondly.

And it was, perhaps, the dread of further encomiums which hastened the blushing girl in her preparations for complying with Mr. Annesley's request, by throwing open the door of her mother's room, in which (in submission to the requirements of the artist's studio) stood the piano.

Sweet as it was expressive, was the ritournelle that prefaced Esther Verelst's articulate and melodious recital of the following stanzas:—

BALLAD.

Yes! other eyes may brighten, love,
When gazing upon thine,
As gloomiest brooks run glittering where
The shedding sunbeams shine.
Oh! did I love thee less, be sure,
Mine own would brighter be;
Content thee, then, with smiles from them,
And bear with tears from me!

Yes! other tones may soften, love,
When to thine ear addrest,
As breezes lulled, the barque allure
O'er ocean's treacherous breast.

Oh! did I love thee less, be sure,
My words would smoother be;
Content thee, then, with praise from them,
And bear with truth from me!

Yes! other arms may bear thee, love,
O'er fortune's flowry way;
Mine, with unwearied fervent faith,
Abide the darker day.
Oh! did I love thee less, be sure,
My aid would prompter be!
Content thee, then, with pleasing them,
And keep thy love for me!

To the utter mortification of poor Esther, not a word of commendation broke from Annesley, at the conclusion of her performance. Her father exclaimed—"Brava, my girl! charming, charming!"—but the voice of Annesley was mute. The piano commanded no view of the room in which her auditors were seated; and she had consequently no means of surmising that if her ungracious friend uttered no common phrase of compliment, it was because his feelings were far too deeply excited for words. Salome, who had watched his tearful eyes

during the exquisite song of her sister, was satisfied!—

"After all, this is a doleful ditty to salute a friend with on his return,"—observed the artist, also noticing the silence of Basil, and with a glance detecting the cause, which he justly attributed to the sensitiveness produced by a previous shock on the spirits. "You forget, my Esther, that Mr. Annesley is come to us from the sick-room of one he loves, and that he wants cheering."

"I am always cheered when I find myself so kindly welcomed to this fireside," said Basil, attempting to rally his spirits; "in the first place, by your cordiality;—in the second, by the sight of your rational occupations. The do-nothing, good-for-nothing world *I* live in, contains few sights so pleasant."—

"I fancied," said Salome, "that the ladies of England were highly enlightened and accomplished?"

"*Superficially* accomplished. They

learn as much music and drawing, and as many languages, as can be taught for money; but nothing is done to cultivate that intellectual sense which renders such acquirements available."

"And these Miss Maitlands, Esther's pupils?"—demanded Salome, returning to the charge.

"Your sister has decided, then, on accepting their tuition?" demanded Basil, in a constrained tone, as Esther, after closing her instrument, returned into the sitting-room.

"I scarcely know what pretext I could find for refusing," she observed, in a timid voice, resuming her former place.

"Would you favour me with a sight of Miss Maitland's letter?" inquired Annesley.

"The letter?—Willingly!"—said Mrs. Verelst, producing it from a paper-rack on the table beside her chair.

"*This* is the handwriting of the brother, who is in the same regiment with myself,"

observed Basil, after examining the letter, having from the first surmised the possibility of a hoax on the part of his brother officers. "If you permit me, I will make inquiries of Lady Maitland concerning her intentions; and bring you an exact account, before you give yourself the trouble and annoyance of a long walk this cold weather, for the sole purpose, perhaps, of gratifying unjustifiable curiosity."

"But what curiosity can poor Esther have excited among persons to whom she is known only by name?" observed Mrs. Verelst, mistrustfully.

"Pardon me,—she is personally known to Lady Maitland's son, who has probably mentioned her to his sisters. Surely," said he, turning suddenly to Esther for confirmation, "you remember the tall, fair, young man, so frequently with old Colonel Carrington, who accosted us at the stage-door, the day you made that hasty exit from rehearsal?"

"Perfectly!" replied Esther, now fully enlightened as to the origin of his objections, "and I am consequently certain that it would be disagreeable to me to give lessons to Lady Maitland's daughters."

"Still, before you give a decided negative, which will, of course, be ungraciously construed, allow me to institute some inquiry into the object of the parties," resumed Basil.—"I see these people daily. I will even make a point of going there to-night. Nothing will be easier than for me to discover, without compromising *you*, whether the young ladies have any serious intention of improving themselves under your hands, and requiting your trouble. The girls are good-natured, though silly and trifling; and would not, I should imagine, lend themselves to unladylike mystification."

"*Must* you go there to night?" inquired Esther, blushing crimson.

"Is there any obstacle?" inquired Basil, surprised at her remonstrance.

"Only that this is Twelfth Night," observed Salome, for once almost as much embarrassed as her sister. Madame Branzini, who intends to *faire tirer les rois* at her house, has made us promise to join her family party; and begged us, should you return to town, to assure you how much honoured she should feel by your company."

"I accept with pleasure!" cried Basil. "But your friend, Madame Branzini, wisely adheres in England to your rational hours of the Continent, and will expect her visitors before nine, and dismiss them at eleven; till which hour, Lady Maitland would be much surprised to see any evening guest enter her house.—I shall, therefore, be able to reconcile both visits.—I dine at the Club, and will be with your friend at——what hour did you say you were going?"—

"We shall be there soon after eight," replied Salome. "We always return home, you know, to assist my mother at ten."

"I will not hear of being an obstacle to your pleasures to-night!"—said Mrs. Verelst, cheerfully. "It is so seldom you enjoy a pleasant party!—Twelfth Day comes but once a-year.—Do you remember, Mr. Annesley, how merrily we kept it, the winter you were at Heidelberg?"—

Basil remembered only too well the joyous cordiality of his old professor's family party.

"Nay, surely *you* were *le roi de la feve?* —ay, and Esther yonder was your queen," cried the artist, laughing heartily at the recollection. "She was a mere child, then;—and *you* little better than a boy. But I remember what a fanciful little majesty we made of her in her mother's brocaded dress, with pompons and powder, and old point, like a queen in one of Mademoiselle de Scudéri's novels!—Little gipsy, that you were, Esther!—you made your old father trick out your draperies and arrange your throne!"

"I wish we may amuse ourselves half so well to-night, at Madame Branzini's!"

murmured Esther, with a sigh. "I was a child then—I feared nothing then,—*now* I seem to be afraid of everything and everybody!"

"You were then in your own home and country, Esther," said the artist, with a sigh far heavier than her own:—"a comfort, my poor child, of which your father's inconsideration has for ever deprived you!"—

"Not for *ever*, I trust!" responded Mrs. Verelst, in a low tone.

"As we are to meet to-night, I will shorten my visit now," said Basil, rising from his seat, by way of interrupting these saddening retrospections; "but I must not go without accomplishing its real object. I have brought you a curiosity to look at, Sir," resumed he, addressing Verelst, after drawing a small volume from his pocket. "Something in your own way—a little book which I borrowed from my mother."—

It was a scarce copy of Hollar's Engravings, after Holbein's Dance of Death,

which was examined by Verelst with deliberation and enthusiasm.

"I know these designs," said he, "far better than I know any of my own!—I spent a month at Basle, for the express purpose of studying the characteristics of that quaint old master.—This is a curious copy, and seems enriched with original interleavings," he observed, scrutinizing the volume with the eye of a connoisseur. "But what have we here?"—There is an Arabic inscription on the title-page—or Sanscrit—or, stay!—*you* Rachael, can help us here.—Are not these Hebrew characters?"—

Basil Annesley took the open volume from the hands of Verelst, to convey it to his wife. On his way, he naturally glanced at the inscription, which was decidedly Hebrew, and written in ink almost invisible from age. But at the foot, in a modern handwriting, to his utter amazement, were inscribed the memorable initials of—A. O.!—

Before he had recovered the shock caused

by this startling, though of course accidental coincidence, the whole attention of Basil was absorbed by the effect produced on Mrs. Verelst by the sight of the volume!—Pale as death, with quivering lips, and suspended respiration, she sank back in her chair the moment the inscription was placed before her!—Esther and Salome, whose attention was constantly directed towards the invalid, were by her side in a moment.

"Place a screen before the fire—I was afraid the room was too close for her!" faltered Esther, opening a large green fan which lay constantly on her mother's table.

"The ether, father!—you will find it on the dressing-table within," cried Salome; nor had either of them leisure to notice that it was by Basil, by whom, as by a devoted son, the commission was executed. The eyes of Mrs. Verelst, however, even after the application of the ether to her temples, remained closed, and her hands cold as marble.

The book, a glance at which young An-

nesley could not forbear regarding as the origin of her sudden seizure, had now fallen on the floor. The dispiriting nature of the frontispiece (which represented the grisly skeleton of Death beguiling an old man into the grave by the music of a dulcimer) had probably conveyed an insupportable shock to the sensitive mind of the enfeebled invalid.

Some minutes elapsed before Mrs. Verelst evinced the smallest token of consciousness; —a longer period than Basil, who had often seen her overcome by faintness, had ever known her remain thoroughly insensible to what was passing around her. At length she slowly unclosed her eyes, and a faint murmur broke from her lips. Esther instantly bent down her head to listen; but Annesley, without any such effort, distinctly heard her exclaim—"My father—*who* was it spoke to me of my father?"

"Better wheel her into her own room," interposed the artist, who, during the swoon of his wife, had stood aloof, distressed

and helpless. "It is nothing—the heat of the fire—the sulphur of those detestable coals!—Let us all be quiet, and she will be herself again in a moment."

Having assisted the girls to remove her into the adjoining chamber, Verelst returned to receive, with an air of stupefaction, the adieus of Basil, who, conscious that his presence at such a moment might be importunate, hastened to withdraw.

It was dusk when Basil emerged from the house, and a desolate winter rain was falling in torrents, splashing into the overflowing kennels, and almost obscuring the light of the lamps. As the young guardsman reached the junction of the small street in which Verelst's house was situated, with South Audley-street, in attempting to muffle himself in his cloak, in resistance to the driving rain, he encountered what, at the first shock, he conceived to be the lamp-post.

But, on recoiling, he found that, in addi-

tion to the lamp-post, he had struck against an individual combating the gusts of wind with a disabled umbrella. Something irresistibly ludicrous in the dilemma of his brother in distress attracted his attention to the struggling wayfarer; when lo! by the light of the lamp, he recognised the marked and well-remembered features of the Money-lender!

The encounter was untimely; but Basil would not shrink from recognising the man by whom he had been so greatly obliged.

"We have untoward weather for our walk," said Annesley, lending his assistance to reverse the obstinate resistance of the reeking cotton umbrella.

"Unpleasant enough; and *you*, who walk for pleasure, might, I should think, spare your pains for a happier moment," rejoined the harsh voice of Abednego.—"With *me*, the case is different."—

"Different indeed!—since you have the means of commanding any sort of equipage

you please, while I have at my disposal only that enjoyed by our father Adam,"—replied Basil, laughing.

"And how long should I enjoy the means, pray,—were I to lavish them on costly equipages?"—rejoined the Money-lender. "Not a year!—not a month, perhaps,—were I tempted into such ridiculous prodigality.—I might be reduced to the same beggarly shifts which bring so many fine gentlemen shuffling—nay, all but begging—to my door!—For whether people beg for a loan, or beg for a gift, where lies the mighty difference?—They are still beggars.—Are you bound for St. James's, young Sir? If so, we may become a mutual benefit. Your arm is strong enough to hold up the umbrella; and by taking mine, we may share it between us. Don't be afraid!—In such weather as this, none of your fine friends will be astir.—No one will recognise the gallant Mr. Basil Annesley cheek-by-jowl with A. O.!"—

"It is no such consideration—" Basil was beginning.

"Away with ye, then, and make an end of the discussion,"—interrupted Abednego, practically enforcing his advice. "Satisfy your scruples by the certainty that you have a second time rendered service to a man who is more than ready to render service to *you*."

Partly carried away by his companion's impetuosity, and partly curious of further insight into his eccentric character, Basil suffered himself to be disposed of. In another minute, he found himself sole occupant of the wet flagstones with the mysterious Abednego.

"But surely, Sir, at your age," said he, by way of renewing the conversation, "the enjoyment of personal comfort must be a greater object than the amassment of mere wealth?"—

"Who is to determine a man's notions of personal comfort?"—cried the Money-lender.

"And what do you mean by *mere* wealth? *My* notion of personal comfort is independence of hirelings, whether man or beast; and as to wealth, what is there in this world beyond it.—What else controls the march of empires—the progress of civilization—the development of science—the cultivation of art?—What but money, causes the crucible to glow,—sinks the shaft,—launches the balloon into the sky—or plunges the diving-bell into the depths of the ocean?—Of what metal is composed the key of the poet's imagination—the orator's eloquence—the physician's skill—the divine's zeal and fervour?—Of gold, Sir—of current gold!—He who hath *that*, commands kings on their thrones, or philosophers in their cabinets! Talk not to me of the refinements of art. If I want to enjoy them, I buy up both art and artists—an orchestra of musicians—a legion of sculptors or painters! Your capitalist, boy—your capitalist is the only solid sovereign of modern times!—'*Mere* wealth?'

quotha—I knew that you were a boy, Basil Annesley, but I held you not for a child!"—

The young man could scarcely resist a smile at the impetuosity of his companion.

"I perfectly agree with you, Sir," said he at last. "But it was by fully estimating the value of money as a means of commanding enjoyment, that I expressed my surprise at your preferring a wet walk to a luxurious carriage."

"Does the sportsman find the greater pleasure in the flavour of his game, or the pursuit of the chase?"—demanded Abednego, in a sterner voice. "Have you not strength of mind to figure to yourself the intensity of enjoyment which a man, appreciating the true value of money, may find in the combinations by which he adds thousand to thousand,—ingot to ingot?—As the artist whose family you have just quitted" (Basil found it impossible to repress a start!) "finds exquisite delight in the progress of a picture by whose perfec-

tionment he hopes to attain profit and fame, does the money-monger glory in the machinery by which his enrichment is accomplished!—Even economy—even privation—has charms, when tending towards the achievement of the grand object of his life! —Ay, stripling, abject as it may seem to you, the Money-lender's is a glorious calling!—Every minute of my life swells the amount of my possessions.—Other men's property diminishes with their span of life; mine, like the evening shadows, grows as the sun goes down.—I am a wretch, eh?—a shabby threadbare wretch, with whom a smart officer like *you*, is ashamed to be seen arm in arm! Shabby and threadbare as I seem, I tell you I hold in subjection those of whose acquaintance you are proud—those to whose acquaintance you barely aspire!—Your fine ladies come and beg of me,—cajole me—flatter me!—cajole and flatter A. O. in his cobweb-tapestried halls of state.—'*Mere* wealth!'—What, but the

wealth I have amassed by trudging in the rain while others swelter in carriages, brings the Duke of Rochester cringing to my feet, lying and swindling for the means of keeping up his empty state!—His covetings of A. O.'s '*mere* wealth' have converted that man, (created by nature for honour and refinement,) into an equivocating pettifogger! —Ay, Sir, you are shocked—you consider my tongue coarse and licentious!—You would plead privilege of peerage against the Money-lender, in favour of the uncle of your fribble acquaintance, young Wilberton."—(Again Basil started.) "But when you have lived longer, you will come to the same conclusions. And now, good evening to you, Mr. Basil Annesley! for here we are, opposite to the Gloucester Coffee House, within hail of your out-at-elbow, discreditable friends the Maitlands!—Good evening! —I should be as loth as yourself to expose you to the shame of being met skulking in the rain under the same ignominious umbrella with such a Barabbas as A. O.!"—

CHAPTER IX.

It is difficult for that which is perfectly simple, and genuinely devoid of affectation, to be chargeable with vulgarity.—STEELE.

BASIL ANNESLEY was just about to enter the smoking-room of his club, after dinner, when the messenger he had despatched with a few lines to Verelst, to inquire after the state of his wife, brought back a note from Salome, informing him that her mother was not only perfectly recovered from her seizure, but that she insisted upon their keeping their engagement with Madame Branzini.

Instantly relinquishing an enjoyment to which he only resorted when unlikely to find himself shortly afterwards in female

society, Basil made the best of his way to his lodgings to dress. In a moment, his heart, previously depressed by his interview with the caustic Abednego, became light as a bird. A whole evening spent in Esther's society, no matter where, was, at present, the brightest prospect this world could afford him.

But for this conciliatory influence, the house to which he was about to repair had little charm for Basil. The husband of Madame Branzini was the Neapolitan consul, and the persons resorting to his society were almost entirely foreigners. For though the highest diplomatic class is cordially welcomed into the best English society, nothing less easy than for foreigners, not included in the pomps of the court, to make their way in a country which prides itself on understanding all languages, and speaking none but its own.

Now there is a natural tendency in persons

moving exclusively in the circles of fashion to depreciate those with whose faces they are unfamiliar. The great world is of such limited extent, that every one of its component parts is known to every one, either by acquaintance or sight; and the moment a strange face appears in the privileged crowd, it is regarded with suspicion.

At the house of the Neapolitan consul, *all* the faces were strange to Basil Annesley. Once or twice, he had joined the circle of Madame Branzini, without finding there a single person he had ever seen before; and among them, not above three or four who spoke his language. It is true, there was much to reconcile him to this strangeness; and a man *blasé* with the insipidity of the *beau monde*, might have experienced the greatest relief in contemplating, in place of the pale and faded faces of the belles of fashion, the fine rich glowing beauty of the southern dames, whose frank and courteous

manners were as yet untrammelled by the conventional laws of the most formal country in the world.

Italians and Spaniards abounded at the house of Branzini, who had many years officiated at Cadiz as consul for the Two Sicilies; a circumstance that explained the dark and sun-burnt complexion of most of the men whom Basil found assembled in his drawing-room; and who, to his Londonized eyes, had very much the air of opera-singers, or French hairdressers. Though his German education in some degree liberalized his views on such points, a public school and the Guards had not a little inspired him with the prejudice of "a man about town," —that every individual differing from himself in dress and manner, must be "*a tiger*."

All Madame Branzini's guests were consequently "tigers" to Basil, though scarcely one but was distinguished by some talent or accomplishment, endowing him with a

name beyond the conferring of king or kaiser. Most of them were men of science, or memorable artists, who had brought letters of introduction to the consul from countries where their abilities procured them those distinctions which England is so tardy in bestowing upon men of genius.

Still, the form of their beards and whiskers, the cut of their coats, the nature of their salutations, rendered them ridiculous or disgusting in the eyes of Basil; and he had scarcely patience, on entering the circle, to find several of these "foreign fellows" devoting their attentions to the beautiful daughters of Verelst.

For then came the vexatious reflection, that *this* was the natural sphere of Esther; —that, even if these olive-hued individuals *were* the opera-singers to which he so flightily compared them, they belonged to the same order of society as the girl he loved.

Yet *who* could gaze upon that well-turned

head, those Grecian features, that exquisite form, every movement of which was grace, and believe them created for any other than the noblest order of society?—No! such women as the Maitlands were not worthy to tie the sandal of Esther Verelst.

She was indeed a being of superior nature. Peculiar elegance of mind served to animate and govern her peculiar elegance of person. Yet in spite of her rare endowments, the spirit of the gifted girl was as meek and humble, as if she possessed no trace of personal distinction. Timid almost to a fault, Esther was content to remain perpetually in the shade. In her own estimation, she was less than nothing, and her chief object in life was to occupy the attention of others as little as she occupied her own. Never did there exist a human being so unselfish!—

But for the passionate attachment of her sister, who gloried in her charms and talents, Esther might often have succeeded in causing herself to be overlooked, where presump-

tuous mediocrity was crowned with laurels. Salome, however, thought for her—felt for her, acted for her,—was vain for her; and insisted on her being heard and seen, when Esther had chosen to retire into some obscure corner. It was Salome who was at the trouble of dressing her, so as to enhance, as far as their limited means would allow, the character of her beauty; and as her sister's good taste restricted the utmost of these efforts to a well-fitting muslin dress, and her fine black hair twisted after the model of some antique bust, the unpretending Esther offered no resistance. She was seldom at the trouble of looking in the glass, indeed, when the task of her affectionate handmaiden was at an end. Beloved in her own family, secure in the friendship of one whom she believed to be superior to external attractions, it was indifferent to *her* whether her dress were more or less becoming than usual.

It was this very absence of pretension,

that constituted the great charm of Esther Verelst. Those who are seen to be wholly unoccupied with themselves, are the first to occupy the attention of others; for vanity is so universal a weakness, that we are better inclined to seek the society of persons whose attention appears at our service.—She was a patient listener—an indulgent companion; and all who, at a distance, had been struck by her beauty or enchanted by the exquisite charm of her singing, were still more fascinated, when, on a nearer acquaintance, they found that the being thus accomplished thought so little of herself, and so much of the feelings of other people.

Still Basil Annesley, much as he had ever admired in his gentle Esther this complete self-abnegation, considered that she was carrying it too far, when he found her at Madame Branzini's, listening deferentially to a "strange-looking man," who was talking Italian to her with earnest volubility.

As he stood opposite contemplating them, and enduring with ungracious impatience, the civilities of his host, he could not help feeling angry at her greater patience. He felt certain that the dingy, bushy-whiskered stranger was redolent of garlic and cigars; and when he smiled at Esther, and Esther smiled in return, Basil could have annihilated the fellow on the spot!—

Verelst, meanwhile, was seated at picquet with an eminent naturalist, his countryman; and Annesley had consequently no means of inquiring the name of this "damned foreigner." He had been often tempted to regret the secluded life led by the Verelsts, as dull and dispiriting for the girls. He *now* felt that they could not be too much at home. To be exposed to the assiduities of such society as they met at Madame Branzini's, was worse than nothing.

"*Such* society!"—Why *such?*—What did he know about these strangers?—Did he understand their position—their habits

—their language? No! but he assumed an Englishman's prerogative of disparaging everything and everybody not precisely modelled after his national pattern.

While giving vent in the depths of his heart to his unutterable disgusts, Esther, at the entreaty of her olive-coloured friend, was about to comply with the request of Madame Branzini, for some music. As she passed him closely by to assume her place at the piano, there was time for a momentary greeting.

"Do not, I entreat you, sing the song of this morning!"—said Basil, certain of not being understood by those around him; to which request, a reproachful glance from Esther, implying the impossibility of such sacrilege, was the only reply.

With all his prejudice against the individuals composing Madame Branzini's coterie, who, because they did not look precisely like the *good* company he was acquainted with, he decided to be *bad*,—Basil was

struck by the good-breeding with which they disposed themselves to do justice to the musician about to exert herself for their entertainment.

In the world with which he was familiar, he had often noticed the involuntary air of contempt with which the reluctant auditors prepare to disparage what they are about to hear; and the readiness with which, by their movements and whisperings, they interrupt the performers. But scarcely was the pure, clear, mellifluous voice of Esther Verelst audible in the first bars of that beautiful German melody, the "Complaint of Thekla," than a pin might have been heard to fall in the assembly. There was perfect good faith in their attention. They listened to be gratified and to praise; not to detect errors in order, hereafter,

To hint a fault, and hesitate dislike;

and by the time the delicate musician had reached the concluding line of her song:—

"*Ich habe gelebt und geliebet!*"

every bosom thrilled in delighted unison with the well-defined expression of the song-stress.

It was strange that, at that moment, Basil Annesley felt more inclined to applaud the audience, than the performer,—as if for a courtesy offered to himself. He felt almost grateful to them for their attention to Esther. From that moment, the assembly assumed new features in his eyes. He listened more civilly to the speeches of old Branzini; and had the grace to ask the names of two or three handsome women present. He even inquired in French, (the language of the house, as of most foreign houses,) the name of the gentleman who had conducted Esther to the instrument.

"The Duca di San Catalda,"—was the reply.

"A *Chevalier d'industrie*, I make no doubt!"—was his mental commentary: but on looking round and perceiving that the Secretary of Legation, and *attachés* of the

Neapolitan mission were present, it was impossible to infer that any person admitted to the house of the venerable consul, more especially a countryman of his own, should be otherwise than respectable.

He was now growing less thankful for the rapture lavished by the party upon Esther's performance. In some respects, Basil had all the waywardness of a spoiled lover. The secluded life of the Verelsts secured him from the usual terrors and jealousies of attachment. Go whither he would, absent himself as he pleased, he was sure to find that lovely girl, on his return, installed in her accustomed place, at her customary occupations; with the certainty that, since their last meeting, her looks, thoughts, or words, had been addressed to no individual qualified to excite his uneasiness. It induced a pang in his bosom, unfelt since the rehearsal-scene of the previous year, to find other eyes fixed upon her beauty, and other courtesies addressed to her ear; and irritated

and unhappy, one of the handsomest of human faces became overclouded with ill-humour.

"Our friends are now arrived," observed Madame Branzini, after looking graciously round upon the groups engaged in lively conversation which filled her drawing-rooms—"let us proceed to draw for king!"

Accustomed to the forms accompanying in Christmas parties this immemorial custom, Basil was surprised to see no token of the huge frosted cake, covered with bonbons and devices, which usually tends to sicken, for the remainder of the month of January, the nurseries of well-conditioned English families. Still more was he startled when, (the handsome children of the Branzinis having been desired to commence the ceremonial, whereupon they insisted that the *gâteau des rois* was too heavy to be carried round without the aid of their dear Esther and Salome!) he saw the Verelsts lend their cheerful aid to offer in succession to the

guests a huge uneatable *galette* from which every gentleman present was to cut a slice.

As the stranger of the party, the honours were offered first to Annesley; and little Teresa and Cesarino Branzini set up a cry of triumph, when, on examination of his slice of *galette*, no bean appeared;—the kingship being decided by the attainment of the fortunate lot containing a *fève*, or bean, dropped into the cake in the process of making.

In succession, young and old, were subjected to the trial; and every new defeat was accompanied by shouts of laughter. In their mirth, however, Basil found it impossible to join. He was thoroughly out of sorts on perceiving that while the attention of the pretendant was fixed upon the *galette* he was cutting, that of the assistants was riveted upon the graceful figures of the two dish-bearers, each worthy to afford a model for a sculptor.

It did not surprise him, so contrary was

his mood, when the portion of the Duke of Catalda was pronounced to contain the bean! He had expected it!—He felt certain that it was a matter of preference and connivance; more especially when the Duke, his fine face sparkling with joy, presented it to Esther, so as to elect her his queen for the evening!

Universal acclamations followed. Basil Annesley found himself required to offer, among the rest, his homage to their majesties; who, according to custom, proceeded to elect their household and grand officers of the crown. He was more provoked than pleased, when, after naming little Teresa and Salome her ladies in waiting, Cesarino her page, and a merry old gentleman named Clary, (the *precis* writer to the French Embassy,) her almoner, she selected *himself* to be her *Chevalier d'Honneur!*—

Few among the party but had been proud to become the knight of Esther!—Yet Basil, whose heart was swelling with the newly-

experienced torment of seeing the woman he loved in intimate communication with others, would gladly have rejected the distinction. It was no longer with him as in their old childish days, in the Neckar-Strasse, at Heidelberg!—He was grown too much a man of the world to enjoy being included in a piece of buffoonery. Most of the company doubled, a few *trebled* his years; yet *he* was the only person too old for the indulgence of joyous sports!—

Probably because the only Englishman present;—the elasticity of spirits which disposes foreigners for enjoyment at any period of life between the cradle and the grave, being singularly deficient, or unfortunately extinguished, in our fastidious natures!—The *disipere in loco* is a pleasure for which time and place are usually wanting in the British empire.

It was not so with the Verelsts. Completely at home in a house where their few intervals of leisure had been spent for two

years past, (during which Salome had officiated as teacher of German to the children,) they gave themselves up with their little pupils to the joyous spirit of the hour. Elated by the presence of the object of her affections, from whom she had been some days separated, the cheeks of Esther glowed with unusual bloom, as she assumed her place beside the Duke, in the two arm-chairs, with foot-stools, which had been hastily covered with India shawls and velvet mantles, in regal guise, for the reception of the king and queen. Compelled to pledge the healths of the company, who drunk to them in return in the exquisite *lacryma Christi*, for which the cellars of the Neapolitan consul were renowned, she assumed courage to play with grace and spirit the part allotted to her in the pageant.

"What a charming actress Mademoiselle Verelst would make!" whispered the rosy Almoner, old Clary, to Annesley, fancying that he was paying her a judicious com-

pliment; and little suspecting that her *Chevalier d'Honneur* would gladly have stuck him to the heart for the mere allusion.

Just as he was meditating an answer not *too* bitter, he found himself plucked by the sleeve by Verelst, whose care-worn face had assumed a holiday aspect under the influence of conquest in a hard fought game at picquet.

"A word with you, my dear Mr. Annesley," said the old man, drawing him off into a corner; and so conscious was Basil of the evil spirit by which he was at that moment possessed, that he almost expected a reproof for his ill manners.

"*Where* did you tell me," inquired the artist, when they were out of hearing of the party,—"that you had found that edition of Hollar?"

"I did not *find* it," replied Basil, almost relieved. "It is my own. For the credit of our taste, I am proud to say that the book is a family possession."

"Most strange!" murmured the old man.

"*Why* strange?" inquired Basil. "There is nothing, I believe, very rare in the volume. I hardly ever saw a considerable book-sale that did not contain a copy."

"Perhaps so; but not *that* copy."—

"Of course not. It has been in our family library these hundred years."

"You use the term hundred years in a figurative sense," added Verelst.

"As my own age does not amount to a quarter of the period, I can scarcely give my personal attestation," observed Basil, with a smile. "But such of my mother's books as did not belong to my father's bachelor library, were probably derived from that of her father, the late Lord L——."

"Lord L——!" exclaimed the painter, again seizing the sleeve of Annesley.—"You do not mean to say that *you* are the grandson of that man?"—

"Perhaps you knew him," said Basil, evasively. "He was more than once, I

fancy, employed in missions at the courts of Germany!"

Verelst was silent—absorbed in reflection.

"Were you acquainted with my grandfather?" again demanded Basil, resolved to obtain an answer.

"I never saw him. Lord L—— was ambassador at Vienna at the breaking out of the French Revolution.—I was then a child.—"

"May I ask, in my turn," inquired Basil, "what particular interest you attach to the copy of Hollar?"—

"Five minutes ago, I would have answered you without hesitation," replied Verelst, in a voice tremulous from agitation. "Now, I must reflect. Inscrutable are the ways of Providence!" faltered the artist, after a few minutes' pause. "That ever I should be indebted for what is dearer to me than my life—the welfare of my family—to the grandson of——But no matter!" said he, checking his ejaculation. And

Basil was too much struck by the profound emotion of the grey-haired artist, to persist in his inquiries. Luckily, he was at this moment summoned to the discharge of his duties, as Lord-in-waiting to the *Reine de la Fève*, to which he was compelled to attend for the remainder of the night; and, much as Basil Annesley's jealous humour had found to cavil at in the easy and cheerful simplicity of Madame Branzini's party, he would gladly have recommenced the evening, when, after taking leave of the Verelsts at the door of their own house, to which he was careful to reconvey them, he proceeded to the more pompous mansion of Lady Maitland.

The party he found assembled in Arlington-street was about the same, in point of numbers and intimacy, he had quitted at the consul's. Nor were the Maitlands and their friends less talkative or less merry; but it was after a fashion of their own. The conversation of that brilliant *coterie*

consisted in scandal, and its mirth in irony. The chief source of their gaiety lay at all times in quizzing old Carrington, or some other butt; and as the Dowager-colonel did not happen to be present when Basil entered, they were only too happy to attack him with railleries more agreeable to *them* than to himself.

"How dolorous he looks to-night!" cried John Maitland, extending a finger to the new comer, but without rising from the sofa on which he was lolling beside a handsome bold-eyed woman of a certain age. "I am afraid, Nancy, (a nickname given to Annesley, among the subs, from his beardless aspect on joining the regiment,) I am sadly afraid you have taken cold!"—

"On the contrary, it is nearly a degree warmer at Barlingham than in London," replied Basil, referring this abrupt conjecture to his country excursion.

A vociferous laugh was the sole answer to this explanation.

"None of your put-offs, my fine fellow!" cried John Maitland. "Here!—Blencowe—Blencowe!—I tell Annesley that I am afraid he caught cold in the rain this morning, and he tries to hum me by talking about his mother's thermometer!"

Captain Blencowe thus apostrophized, stationed himself on the scroll of the *chaise longue*, in an attitude little more ceremonious than that of his friend.

"I could scarcely suppose my movements of sufficient consequence," said Basil, somewhat nettled, "to make you aware that, a few hours after my arrival in town, I had enjoyed a wet walk."

"And in such company!" retorted Maitland, "arm-in-arm with an old beggarman, under a cotton umbrella!"—

"*Reste à savoir*," cried the lady with the bold bright eyes, "which of the two was affording hospitality to the other!"—

"If you have any interest in inquiring," said Basil, aware that to defeat a jester is

best achieved by meeting him half-way, "the cotton umbrella was the property of my companion; and an enviable property I thought it, in that pelting shower!"

"He talks as reverentially as if the old gentleman were his grandfather!" cried John Maitland.

"I did not know that Nancy *had* a grandfather—*extant*, I mean. (I was not going to parody the vulgar quiz on Brummell.) Of course, I am aware, that there was once a Lord L——; and surmise, that a Sir Bernard Annesley was not produced out of a crucible," said Captain Blencowe, watching, from a distance, the impatience with which Lucy Maitland awaited Annesley's release from her brother.

"The old beggarman who appears to have excited your curiosity," said Basil, with some emphasis, "was no relation of mine; but simply a person who obliged me with shelter from the rain."—

"From South Audley to St. James's-street," interrupted Blencowe.

"From South Audley to St. James's-street!" coolly repeated Basil—and all the more coolly, that he was conscious of being in a passion.

"If no relation of yours, then, perhaps a relation of the pretty Jewess?" persisted Maitland, also vexed at finding that his jokes were missing their mark.

"*What* pretty Jewess?" persisted Basil. —"I should think your acquaintance with the Jews likely to be quite as extensive as my own."—

"I should have been extremely happy to improve it with the lovely Esther," retorted Maitland; "but you and Carrington, or rather Carrington and *you*, were beforehand with me."

"If you allude to Miss Verelst," said Basil, gravely, "I have once or twice informed you, that she was as much a Jewess as *you* a Christian,—that is, in name alone. —I am astonished, however, Maitland, that you should allude thus lightly to a lady

whom you are anxious to introduce into your mother's house, as the preceptress of your sisters."

"Hear, hear, hear, hear, hear!"—cried Maitland, in a voice that attracted the attention of the whole party. "Here is Nancy owning, with matchless audacity, that though only a few hours in town, he has been already playing the secretary, and examining the engagements of pretty Esther, the opera girl."—

"*Is* there an opera girl of the name of Esther?"—demanded Wilberton, who having been just elected of the Omnibus-box, felt bound to make himself Master of its Arts and Sciences.

"I believe *not!*"—replied Basil, struggling to command himself; "certainly not, in the person of the young lady to whom Maitland alludes.—As he seems resolved to acquaint himself with everybody's business but his own, I am surprised he does not obtain better information."

"My dear Nan!—I am now convinced that the shabby old fellow with the umbrella, whom Blencowe saw you skulking with in Piccadilly, *is* some near relation, or you would not be so deuced touchy at having been discovered!"—cried young Maitland, starting from the sofa, and slapping Annesley provokingly on the shoulder.

"If Blencowe *did* see me with the individual in question," cried Basil, harassed out of his self-possession, "I wonder he did not give a more correct account; since the stranger was an acquaintance of *his* long before he became an acquaintance of mine!"

"An acquaintance of Blencowe's?"—cried John Maitland,—while Loftus, Wilberton, and several others, crowded round, on perceiving, by the tone of the parties, that something was going wrong.

"An acquaintance of Blencowe!" persisted Basil Annesley; "and an acquaintance of most of you beside; being no other than the redoubtable A. O.!"

The silence of consternation instantly pervaded the giddy circle.

Ignorant of the awkward scene in Arlington-street, to which, during his absence in the country, Lady Maitland's friends had been witnesses, Basil was totally at a loss to understand the confusion which appeared to have arisen from an explanation extorted from him by the persecution of the triflers he so little intended to persecute in return!—

It was the first time he had seen so astounding an effect result from mere mention of the cabalistic name of—A. O.!

END OF VOL. I.

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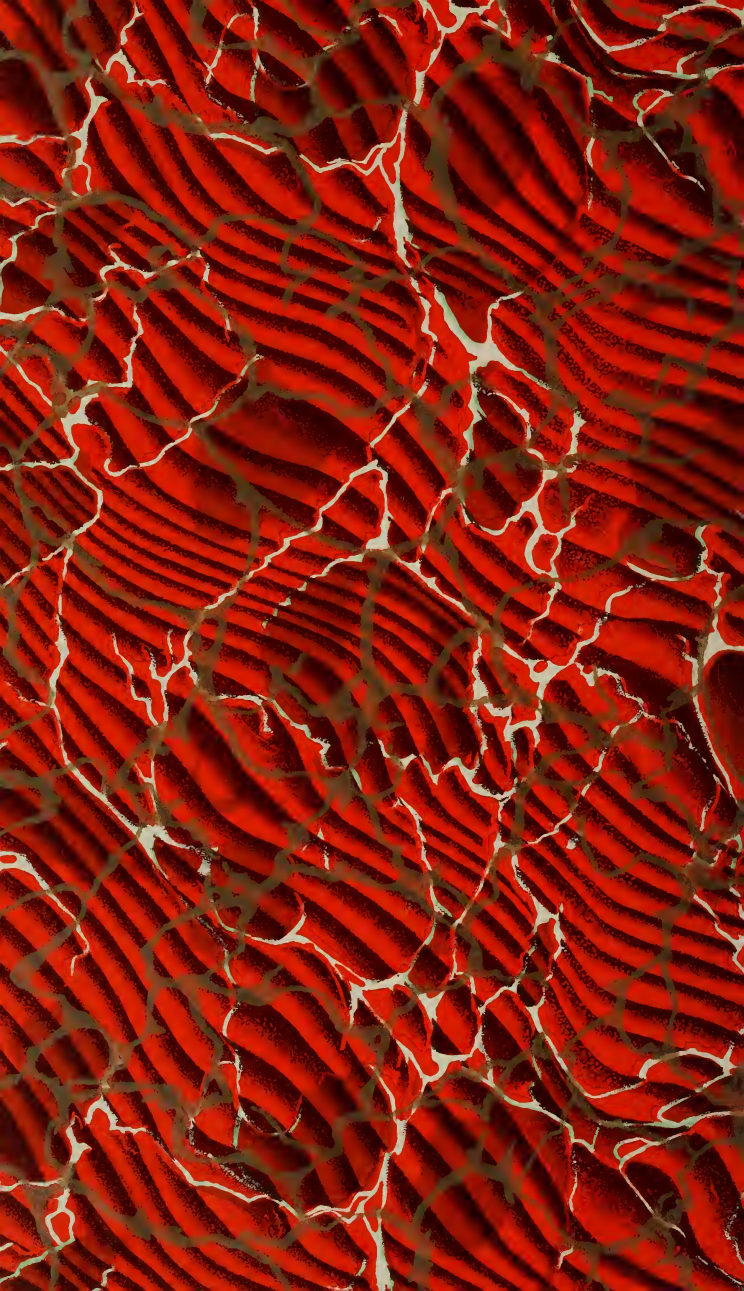

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